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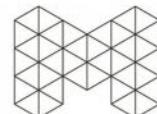
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It's not you ... it's your story

Branding is one of the major pain points for entrepreneurs. On the outside it seems simple, but its core is complex.

How can I become a great brand? How can I make this brand sustainable? What will bring value to my brand? Just what is my story, and how do I tell it? And, my favorite question and the most important by far: What the hell is branding?

Branding is more than a logo. It's more than a website. It's more than a business card. It's more than the colors and typefaces you choose to represent your company. Your brand is your voice in the marketplace, and it is your proposition for disruption. It is your opportunity to create something with lasting impact. It is how you tell your story, and it is absolutely key to your success and your survival.

Most entrepreneurs go to market not with a brand, but with an idea—an idea that can be so soulful and personal that it can be challenging to present and explain to others. You think everyone should intrinsically understand it, as you do—but they don't. And that's why you need to develop effective brand messaging.

One of the most frequent comments I hear is, "People just don't understand us, our value and what we do, but we are absolutely the best at it." That statement is a problem. Your brand is your story, and if you can't tell it, then nobody will get it.

If you ever catch yourself making that sort of statement, take a step back. Because it is total BS. No one is that special. This is business, not *Dr. Phil*, and if you cannot communicate the value of what you bring to the market, the economy and the world, well then, you have a problem.

Branding is about knowing what you stand for and how you communicate the values and character of your product or service. As a company founder, this is not so much a design choice as it is a leadership decision. Your job as chief is to know exactly, concisely and in context what you stand for. You are the lone author of your story, your mission and your reason for being. How you tell it is your job.

In this issue, we bring you some vivid examples of great branding—from Levi's to beer koozies to social media stars. These are brought to you by the top minds in the business. Not to play favorites—but, hell, I *am* playing favorites—perhaps the story in this issue I love most is about one man's mission to democratize porridge (Business Unusual, page 16). Yes, porridge. The gooey grain that warms your heart. (Or something like that.)

His name is Lasse Andersen and he lives in Copenhagen, where porridge is sacrosanct. His story is this: In his heart and mind, porridge—cozy, healthy and a major part of Danish food culture—needs to be bigger. Everyone needs access to it. Democratize porridge! He was passionate enough to create a chain of retail outlets and expand into packaged goods. And he has, perhaps by accident, created a brand that is spilling across international borders.

The beautiful and brilliant thing about Andersen's brand is that its mission and value are crystal-clear to his customers and can be summed up in one word: *comfort*.

Branding is about democratizing your product or service. And this issue is meant to help you do just that.



Amy C. Cosper
Editor in Chief
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Lessons in greatness

We received a high volume of letters regarding "It's OK to be great" (Editor's Note, February).

I love how you stated the brutal truth of being an entrepreneur. It's not always glamorous and is often scary and lonely. Being solely in charge of my company's destiny kind of freaks me out. And you are right—being a leader makes you very vulnerable. Vulnerable to criticism on one's intelligence, competency and ability to make money. It can take a toll on your self-esteem and change the way you see yourself. But in all its misery and glory, success and failure, it all matters and is absolutely meaningful.

*Komal Iqbal
Riverside, Calif.*

Your Editor's Note is out-of-this-world perfect. Thank you so much. You have no idea how much it helped me at this very precise moment. I had just texted my dad, "We're expanding to the two offices next door. Daunting, but I'm meditating in order to keep all in perspective." And then I opened your mag as I got into bed.

*Natalie
Miami*

I just read your Editor's Note, and I feel good about running my own business again. The past month was very stressful. Between my business slowing down and me getting no sleep because of my 5-month-old daughter, I was starting to get nervous about my company, staff and (most of all) my family's future. Just this morning I was considering looking for a job. After reading your column, I was reminded of our success over the past three years. I need to stop worrying and get back to being creative. We all need a kick in the butt sometimes. Thanks!

*Saeid
San Diego*

"It's OK to be great" is an affirmation that as entrepreneurs, we are unique and bold. I love that. I love the thrill of tackling a new challenge. Six years ago I started a healthcare marketing firm with nothing but a prospect list. Today I'm flying home from presenting for one of our medical products companies at its national sales meeting. As you've said, it's not easy, but it's worth every minute of every sleepless night.

*Mike Milligan, president,
Legato Healthcare Marketing
De Pere, Wis.*

Retail therapy

I felt [the sidebar] "Playing with the big boxes" (Business Unusual, February) did not give fair warning to small vendors. It presents five options on how to be positive in the process. What is ignored: Big boxes often take product with the caveat of sales. Somewhere in the small print it often indicates that merchandise not sold can be returned ... and that the vendor might be responsible for the shipping. Another issue could be the request for funding toward marketing or the need to mark a price down, therefore requiring the vendor to make contributions on all fronts.

My suggestion would be to go in confident as suggested, but read the small print before signing on the dotted line.

*Shelly Fisher
Conshohocken, Pa.*

Straight dope

"Safer" pot-delivery as a legitimate business (Franchisor, February)? What a sad commentary on the state of the country. Yes, most vapor is delivering illegal drugs. Putting that forth as an OK way to make money? Not something I want to read about.

*John Stapleton
Austin*

Heroes at work

I just wanted to say thank you. I separated from the Marines in 2014. I saw how hard it was for veterans to find work, so I started my own business. We work with companies that are looking to hire veterans or start a veteran initiative. It has been a road laced with a whole new kind of IED. I have started reading your publication religiously, and it has helped a lot to navigate the new obstacles.

*David Gunter, CEO, The Staffing Corps
York, S.C.*

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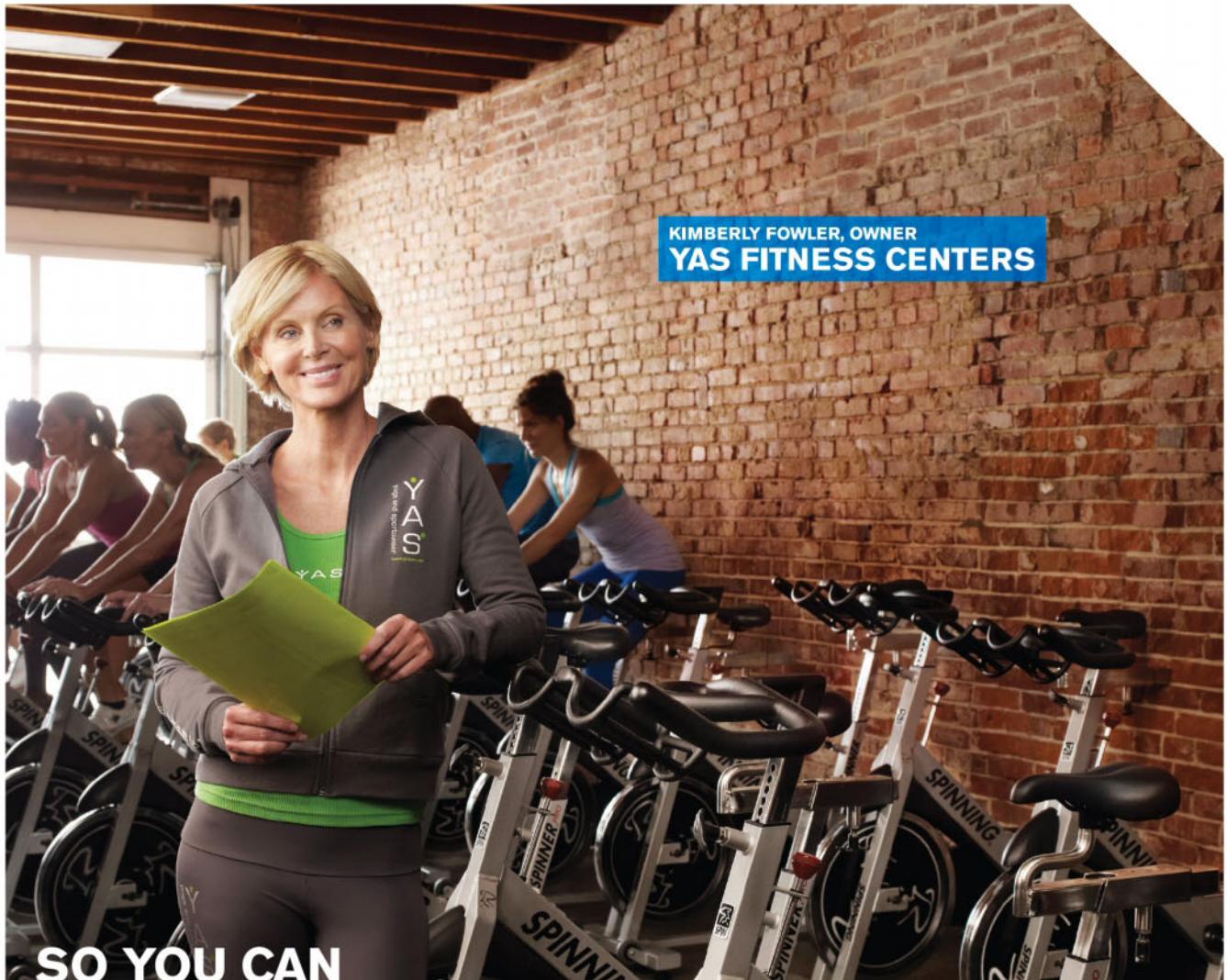
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Comfort in a bowl

Hot porridge gets cool at Denmark's Grød

Walk through the streets of Copenhagen's Nørrebro district and you'll pass the home of Denmark's most down-to-earth hipster treat. That would be Grød—"porridge" in Danish—a 12-seat shop that serves \$8 bowls of its namesake food: hot mashed oats, spelt or barley, often with milk and a fruit compote mixed in. When lunch or dinner rolls around, the menu changes to \$10 to \$11 bowls of risotto, Asian-inspired congee and Indian dal.

Founder Lasse Andersen says Grød's menu demonstrates the breadth of such

comfort foods from around the world. "Every culture has a version of porridge," he says. "With some dishes, they take whatever grains are available, cook them and get all their basic nutrition from them. Porridge isn't only the Northern European idea of oats. It's rice in Asia and Italy, quinoa in South America, grits in North America."

Three years ago, while studying music in London, Andersen began buying to-go cups of porridge at the train station. It was then he decided to bring high-quality porridge to his hometown. Considering

the less-than-supportive view of entrepreneurship in Denmark, it was a bold move.

"My parents and friends thought I was crazy to not finish school and become an entrepreneur," he says. "In Denmark, when you tell someone that you're self-employed, they immediately assume that you're not educated, that you didn't go or couldn't go to university, and couldn't find a job. It can be a very difficult place to pursue your passion, since it doesn't have a good startup culture."

Undaunted, Andersen used \$50,000 from an inheritance to open his first shop

Spreading warmth:
Lasse Andersen.



in 2011 and has been learning on the job ever since. He muddled his way through Copenhagen's municipal bureaucracy to obtain permits and found his first suppliers on Google. When he opened, he wasn't even sure if his tiny shop would be a take-away or eat-in venue.

"I didn't know what to expect when our customers first walked in," Andersen says. Patrons quickly embraced the experience of eating hot porridge by sitting down to enjoy it. "It's crazy; our second shop is even smaller than our first, but we still have seats because people want to sit and eat."

Those shops, plus events, festivals and catering, brought in roughly \$800,000 in 2014, but the concept has earned Andersen an even larger reputation around town. He came out with a por-

ridge cookbook and appears regularly on a weekly TV cooking show. In his biggest coup, last year he signed on with 7-Eleven and the largest Dutch supermarket chain, Albert Heijn, to sell \$3 to \$4 cups of instant porridge.

"7-Eleven began selling it in 200 stores in Denmark, and it's doing very well. Albert Heijn just started selling it in 600 stores," he says. "I think, very quickly, the instant porridge could become the most profitable part of the business."

That isn't to say that he'll stop opening Grød storefronts. "The shops are the experience, and the experience is key to the brand," he says. "The 7-Eleven collaboration came about because the brand was bigger than our shops."

In February, he opened a third shop in

Copenhagen. Ultimately he'd love to set up a New York City location.

"The way I see it, New York has the most people from everywhere passing through. If I can make porridge work there, starting with a small shop with a lot of nerdiness in a cool locals' neighborhood, I can create a great brand and ideology that will be spread around the world." —Grant Davis



FROM DRAB TO FAB

It takes determination (and a strong mission) to turn an everyday item like mashed oats into a hip brand. Grød's Lasse Andersen shares how he did it.

Tell your story. Behind every product is a story. Find yours and tell it honestly.

"I love porridge," Andersen says, "and the energy and passion I have for it is my company's core value. I communicate that this business is not about the money. It's about making the world a better place. I honestly believe that's what I'm doing."

Andersen's passion has attracted media attention and created viral buzz. "I've spent nothing on marketing or

advertising since I opened," he says. "All our attention has been viral, word-of-mouth."

Believe in your brand's value. If you have belief that what you're selling can make the world a better place, customers will want to pay for it.

"We're true to our passion over this product, and we don't do anything that could mess with it, like giveaways, discounts or deals that could cheapen the brand in customers' eyes," Andersen says. "We don't look for ways to increase margins by using cheaper ingredients. Instead, we look for ways to make our porridge more delicious and desirable."

Recruit people who share your passion. Though Andersen originally hired trained chefs to work in his shop, he learned that the best employees aren't necessarily the most experienced. His ideal staffer is someone who is down-to-earth and wants to wow the customer. In return, that employee gets a paycheck and what Andersen calls "the positive energy that comes from doing a good thing. I look for people who want that feedback to work for me."



CELEBRATING ENTREPRENEURIAL DRIVE



CHEVROLET
CITY EXPRESS to
SUCCESS
CHALLENGE

CONTEST HIGHLIGHTS PASSION FOR SMALL BUSINESS AND ICONIC AMERICAN BRAND

In November 2014, *Entrepreneur* and Chevy launched the first-ever, month-long City Express to Success Challenge—a contest in which the grand prize winner drove off with a 2015 Chevrolet City Express LT van and four runners-up each got \$1,000 gas cards.

The responses showed, once again, that entrepreneurship in America is all about passion. The thousands of videos and essays submitted by small business owners all over the country told us about what it takes to start from the ground up, what it means to dream big, and, ultimately, about the desire to drive long-term success.

Beyond an emphatic voicing of the entrepreneurial spirit in this country, the responses spoke to small business owners' affinity for the Chevy brand and the company's heritage for offering hard-working vehicles. The demand for the City Express, in particular, led to a feeling that it was as if entrepreneurs had been waiting for Chevy to offer just such a van.

CHOOSING FROM AN ARRAY OF RESPONSES

While the sheer number of responses made it tough to judge the contest, the variety of businesses represented made it just as complex. To help put potential winners in perspective, we placed the entries into 10 different categories, such as Business Services, Mobile Offices, and Construction and Home Services. Businesses within those categories ranged from dry cleaners, plumbers, physical therapists, and bands, to dog trainers, organic farmers, beekeepers, and everything in between.

Clearly, it was difficult to pick a grand prize winner. At the end of the day, the decision was based on how contestants answered this key challenge: How will the Chevy City Express impact your business and your brand, and grow your business?

The grand prize winner, French Creek Medical Supply, in Avon, Ohio, ultimately won us over through their submission of an animation video depicting a virtual "day in the life" of a French Creek-logoed City Express undertaking clinical supply and distribution runs. We

were taken by the fact that the innovative video didn't feature the owner, Tim Wible, but about the ways in which the van would help French Creek grow.

Wible's response to the win? "More than a vehicle, the City Express will create opportunity and prosperity. Thanks for believing in our venture!"

GRAND PRIZE WINNER



OWNER
TIM WIBLE
FRENCH CREEK MEDICAL

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE WINNERS

Creative Contracting & Consultation
Thomas Stauffacher, founder - Palm Coast, FL

Kids 4 Coding
Denise Detamore & AnnMarie Laramee
co-founders - Roswell, GA

Sweet Cheeks Fair Treats
Mariah Vitoria, founder - Hilmar, CA

Voyage Visuals
Alan Jaskiewicz & Tyler Morris
co-founders - Saltsburg, PA

Learn more about their stories at cityexpressstosuccess.com

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It's all in the jeans

A curated women's shopping service brings the stylist home



If Stitch Fix has its way, no woman will have to suffer the indignity of unflattering dressing-room lighting again.

The San Francisco-based e-tailer, founded in 2011 by Katrina Lake, ships curated clothing and accessories directly to its customers. The selections are based on a 10-minute style profile that asks practical questions about height, weight and body shape, but also drills down for style preferences and whether a customer wishes to flaunt her cleavage, arms, legs or midriff, or keep them covered. Users schedule how often they

receive new deliveries.

The heart of the organization is its stylists. They draw from more than 200 brands—six of them exclusive, representing more than 30 percent of the company's merchandise—to personalize each five-item Stitch Fix box. Users pay a \$20 styling fee per order, which goes toward the items they keep; they have three days to return the rest. If they purchase all five items, they receive a 25 percent discount.

But what Stitch Fix is most known for is its uncanny ability to ship the perfect pair of jeans. "The experience of

shopping for denim is so broken, and our buyers have put a lot into figuring out which are the best brands," Lake says, pointing out that most of the company's customer feedback concerns jeans. "What a miracle it feels like when someone can send you, sight unseen, a pair that fits you great."

Lake worked as a consultant for clients such as Kohl's and Applebee's and managed the blogger platform at Polyvore before entering Harvard Business School with the goal of finessing her business model and securing funding. She

accomplished both. Baseline Ventures' Steve Anderson provided \$750,000 in seed money; two 2013 infusions followed: \$4.75 million in February from Baseline and Lightspeed Venture Partners, and \$12 million in October from Benchmark Capital.

Stitch Fix would not confirm reports of a \$30 million Series C round in mid-2014 that would value the company at \$300 million.

In addition to her consulting work, Lake drew from her experience working at Banana Republic in high school. "Working with people in a fitting room gives you so much more of a sense that it's not just selling clothes. Some people are making decisions based on form and function, but for others, it is about 'feeling awesome in this blouse,'" she explains. "When I applied to business school, I didn't have the exact idea, but I had this notion of how you could integrate retail, technology and data to be able to deliver a better retail experience."

The average Stitch Fix user is a thirtysomething professional, but Lake has also heard from cancer patients who don't have the energy to shop and women who need clothes in a pinch. "We had a woman who was able to get a delivery in time to get a black dress for a funeral," she says. "We hear an immense number of touching stories."

Within 90 days of receiving their first shipment, 70 percent of clients order a second box, Lake says. The average cost per item is \$55, a \$10 drop since the company's launch. "As we've gotten bigger and our market is growing, we've seen that our customer is a little more mass-market, so we've been able to bring down the price a little bit."

However, Lake made the decision not to be an off-price

retailer. "There was a point where there was a perception that any successful retailer had to be in a race to the bottom, offering everything cheaper and faster," she says. "There's a whole class of products where [that] is the right value proposition, but for apparel we want to help people find products that fit them best for

their price point and style."

Lake would not comment on revenue, but staffing increases indicate rapid growth. Since 2013, the company has gone from about 200 to more than 1,500 full- and part-time staffers, spread across its main San Francisco office, newly opened satellite offices in Austin and Pittsburgh

and distribution centers in South San Francisco and Indianapolis. The team boasts high-profile retail veterans, including COO Mike Smith, formerly of Walmart.com, and board members who have held key posts at Sephora, Gap and Banana Republic.

Although Lake hopes to eventually expand, there are

no near-term plans to diversify into plus sizes, men's or children's clothing.

"Over the long term, we're thinking about how we can make the service more broadly acceptable to other segments," she says. "Shorter term, we're focused on [improving] what we're doing today." —Melinda Newman

| DESIGN |

PACKAGING OF THE MONTH

By Andrew Gibbs

WHO: Uneka Concepts is a San Francisco Bay Area packaging design and manufacturing company. Together with the Lytro team, Uneka designed and manufactured an environmentally friendly packaging concept for the new Lytro Illum DSLR camera.

WHAT: To showcase the innovative minimalist design and sleek matte finish of the Illum, the second-generation Lytro camera, Uneka created a package that acts as a display case. An outer sleeve highlighted with geometric patterns slides off to reveal a multilayered box, which unfolds in three parts when lifted by ribbons. Additional components, designated by clean black-on-black iconography, are housed out of sight within the side panels.

WHY WE LOVE IT: The artful design of the camera itself is expressed perfectly in its premium packaging. Each component has been considered, from the use of eco-friendly materials to the unique opening ceremony. The packaging is sophisticated, stylish and a leap above that of most digital cameras priced above \$1,000.

ANDREW GIBBS IS EDITOR IN CHIEF OF THE DIELINE AND EDITORIAL AND CREATIVE DIRECTOR OF HOW MAGAZINE.



The right way to go

How to vacation like a boss

Giving yourself permission to walk away from your company can be difficult. But if you can't do it for yourself, do it for your staff: When you take vacation time, you're setting a good example.

"The problem is that we don't see executives take time off. The indirect message [to employees] is that they shouldn't take time off either," says Sara Canaday, an Austin-based leadership consultant and author of *You—According to Them: Uncovering the Blind Spots That Impact Your Reputation and Your Career*.

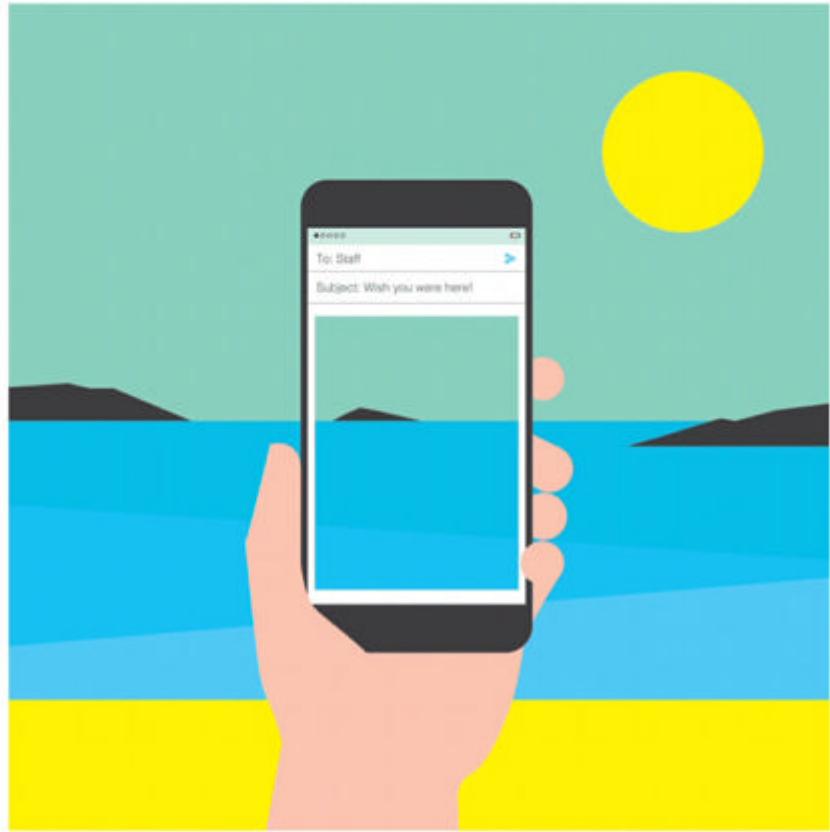
One employee of a small company (who asked not to be named) describes working for a boss who didn't like to travel and never took more than a long weekend off. "She really thought that it was outrageous for us to want a week—or more, God forbid!—at a go," she says.

Demonstrating to your staff that there is life outside of work can be a major morale booster that adds significant value to your company. So book that getaway—but before you do, give a thought to the employees who will be holding down the fort while you're gone, and who may not have the resources for the kinds of escapes you're able to afford. What kind of message are you giving them as you walk out the door?

"A boss who's taking that dream vacation may be thinking it's something that others should aspire to," Canaday says. "But where the buck stops is that you don't want to flaunt it. People don't need to know the details."

If you're generally a thoughtful and respectful leader, your staff is likely to cut you slack if you return to the office bubbling with stories about your perfect holiday. "If you're not normally boastful, then people are going to be much more inclined to say, 'Wow, he or she just really wants to share,' rather than think you're rubbing it in their faces," says Melody Wilding, a New York City-based therapist who focuses on workplace issues.

And if you honor the lives employees lead outside the office (for example, by refraining from emailing or phoning them during off hours), they will be equally supportive of your taking time for yourself.



Schedule your time off far enough in advance for your staff to take necessary action to prevent bottlenecks while you're gone. Let them know under what circumstances they should contact you. And when you get back, meet with key members of your team to let them catch you up on where things are, rather than sashaying back in and immediately wresting control back from whoever had it in your absence.

Of course, if you are walking out the door without a thought about how your staff manages without you, you might be wise to use this time for some serious soul searching.

"You've checked out emotionally and mentally," Wilding says, "and it's time to reevaluate what you're doing, at the very least." —Sophia Dembling



More wheels up

Lower oil prices should help grease the wheels of U.S. business travel this year. According to a report from the Global Business Travel Association, air travel prices are expected to decline 0.9 percent in 2015—a nice change from the 4 percent increase projected at the end of 2014.

The boost in discretionary income from the decline in gas prices should help drive total spending on U.S. business travel in 2015 up 6.2 percent to a record \$310.2 billion—a positive domestic note in the midst of a weak economic outlook for Europe and Asia.

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ON THE APP

CHRIS PHILPOT'S ANIMATED LOOK AT CONFERENCE CALLS



The blind leading the blind

If it's not awkward silence, then everyone's talking at once. Here's how to take control of the conference call.

By Ross McCammon

Leading a conference call is just like leading any other meeting, only you're not able to see if people are engaged. You're not able to tell if you're leading it effectively. You can't depend on body language to communicate your engagement level, and you're not able to read the body language of others. What this reality demands is your usual mode of leadership accented with a slight mechanical bearing.

If you are normally freewheeling, focus a little more than you're used to. If you are normally sunny, let a few clouds in. If you

are normally inclined to ask everyone in the room how their weekend was, maybe don't do that. In fact, don't ever do that.

For the sake of the conference call, err on the side of rigid.

Since you can't be rigid without being punctual, the first rule of the conference call is: Be on time—especially if you're leading it. Like, right on time. If the conference call is at 2:30, you need to be on that call at 2:29:52. Eight seconds of Chopin or "The Girl from Ipanema," then the other people join, and off you go. There are certain people who always

arrive to meetings late. If you are one of these people, you must suspend your belief in the mutability of start times. You must be punctual.

It's helpful to have notes prepared in advance. Never read your notes, of course. You can always tell when someone on the phone is reading a prepared statement. Their tone doesn't quite track with the content of their message. Nervous radio callers do this. CEOs delivering financial results do this. My sixth-grade girlfriend Rachel did this when she broke up with me. (She denied it, but I'm pretty

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sure that's how it went down.) Your notes should simply include key words and phrases: a road map for the things you need to say.

The next thing you want to do—it's a small thing, no big deal—is adopt an entirely new persona. Say, that of a TV news anchor doing a round robin with reporters in the field. If you are not the leader, you must adopt the persona of one of the reporters speaking to an anchor via satellite. There are other reporters weighing in, too, which means that when it is your turn to speak, you must get in and get out.

Another important part is that you have to be serious. A face-to-face meeting can be a playground for jokes. But for the conference call, jokes don't work. Comedic timing is inherently thrown off because of the delay and lack of visual emotional cues. No one can read your body language, which is a key part of humor. And everyone just wants to get this over with already. No jokes.

And ... really focus. When we're in meetings, we are forced to keep our eyes open, not pick at our fingernails, not yawn, not pretend two of our fingers are a dancer doing Rockettes-style kicks on our desk. (Is that last one just me? Maybe that's just me.) During conference calls, these things are permissible because they are hidden from view. But these freedoms can make us complacent. They can make us lose step with the conversation. This can lead to being asked a question that we are not prepared to answer, which is humiliating and impolite. Pay attention as if you were in an actual conference room with these people.

And try not to laugh. I know this sounds like cold advice, but laughter on a conference call sounds like a hellish clamor. A snicker, fine. Perhaps a giggle. But no chortling.



SHOULD THIS CONFERENCE CALL BE HAPPENING?

Are we talking about something important? YES NO

Really important? YES NO

Really, really important? YES NO

Are all three to seven of us really necessary? YES NO

Are there fewer than seven people on this call? YES NO

Can the goals of this meeting be met without brainstorming? YES NO

If you answered "no" to any of these questions, this conference call should not be happening.

Banter doesn't work either. Especially with more than three people on the line. Four opinions and zero eye contact is a very complicated neurosocial dynamic.

And no riffing. The conference is a minefield when you introduce conversational cul de sacs and aborted sentences. The back-and-forth will bog things down. Conference calls are for commenting and reporting and correcting and pitching. They're not for brainstorming or chitchat.

So, speak in long statements. And when someone else speaks, let him or her have the floor for longer than you might. No interrupting. Unless they've gone on too long, let them speak.

The conference call should almost exclusively involve information delivery. Easy on the niceties. Easy on the banter. Easy on the humor. Easy on the asides. Otherwise it makes a very simple thing unnecessarily difficult.

VOICE LESSONS

There's been a ton of research done on body language in the past 10 years. We now know that a long gaze suggests power, empathy, self-assuredness and

intelligence. We know that crossing our arms can signal that we're closed off to change. And that slumping down in a chair suggests disinterest. These aren't necessarily "tells" in regular meetings—research has also shown that it's a bad idea to try to read people solely through body language (that's another column)—but on conference calls, such cues are missing altogether.

What is underrated but necessary here is the importance of your voice. The quality of your voice: its clarity, volume and authority. Speak with a slightly intense disposition. Let your voice guide the meeting as much as the content of your statements. Make up for the intensity you can't convey visually with an intensity you can convey verbally.

Right, guys?

Guys?

Hello?

Great. We must have been disconnected.

ROSS MCCAMMON IS A SENIOR EDITOR AT ESQUIRE. HIS BOOK *WORKS WELL WITH OTHERS* WILL BE PUBLISHED THIS FALL BY DUTTON.

KEY TECHNICAL MATTERS

- No small talk. Once you've made sure everyone is present, just start in on the business.
- Always wait two seconds after someone else has stopped speaking in order to secure the field.
- When in doubt, don't add your two cents.
- When you find yourself speaking over someone else, determine quickly if you are going to power through or concede.
- If you're going to concede, immediately stop talking

and let the other person have the floor.

• If you're going to power through, then POWER THROUGH AND TAKE THEM DOWN!

• Imagine everyone can see you. Focus on the meeting as if you were all in the same room.

• Sit up straight and be attentive to every word.

• You know what? Relax; it's not that big of a deal. Just be attentive.

• OK, that's too relaxed. Sit up a bit.



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Don't be tone-deaf

How your branding voice can differentiate your company

By Ann Handley

One of the biggest branding mistakes companies make is not paying enough attention to their tone of voice.

"Voice" is one of those concepts that may sound better suited to the literary world than the business world. In literature, it refers to how you come across in your writing. In marketing, your tone of voice can be a significant differentiator.

Companies spend a great deal of time on logos, color selection and other cues they think of as "branding"—the look and feel of their website, collateral and signage. But very few take the time to consider the benefits of employing a unique voice. Consider this: If you were to mask the logo on your website, would you sound unique? Or would you sound like everyone else (i.e., your competitors)?

Your tone of voice isn't about *what* you say but *how* you say it—and it's about the impression your brand leaves on customers. Developed correctly, your tone of voice can be the secret sauce in your content recipe.

DEFINE WHAT MAKES YOU YOU.

Marketers call this developing a "brand positioning statement" or "mission statement."

Whatever you call it, the idea is to define who you are. Or, as Dr. Seuss wrote, "Today you are you, that is truer than true. There is no one alive who is youer than you." He wasn't talking about marketing, but he might as well have been.

Ask yourself these key questions:

- What's unique about your business?
- What's special about your products?
- What's special about the way you do business?
- What's your company culture like? (Are you buttoned-up or playful?)
- How do your employees relax together? (Do you play beer pong in the parking lot or have morning yoga sessions?)
- How do you want to be regarded by customers and your community? (Are you a trusted source for high-level insight or hands-on practical advice?)

This should help you come up with a few keywords that best define who you are. But go beyond the generic.

"Don't fall into the trap of choosing trite, nondifferentiating factors such as 'friendly,' 'honest,' 'reliable' and so on as brand values," says Andrew Bredenkamp, founder and chairman of



Acrolinx, a software platform that helps companies hone their tone of voice. Such attributes are just one big *duh*, or "the least you would expect from any company," he says. "They may be important to your service, but they won't help you create a distinctive tone."

It's also wise to avoid buzzwords and clichés like "cutting-edge," "proactive" or "revolutionary." "If you're looking to be different, they put you at a disadvantage right from the start," Bredenkamp notes.

Instead, identify more descriptive terms that reflect specifically who you are and how you wish to be perceived.

TRANSLATE THOSE WORDS INTO A STYLE.

Abstract attributes in isolation don't mean much, so develop some detail around them. Make them real and practical.

For example, if one of your brand values is "creative," what exactly do you mean? When and how are you creative? How does your creativity help clients? Or, if one of your brand values is "unusual," what exactly does that mean? In what ways are you unusual, and how does that quirkiness benefit customers? Do you solve problems differently? Do you have an approach that exemplifies that ideal in the real world?

Flesh out those words with a few sentences or a story.

WRITE IT DOWN.

I almost said "create a style guide," but I worried I'd lose those of you who might think such a notion would be pedantic—



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especially for growing, scrappy businesses. But I think it's important for entrepreneurs. Often, the brand voice of an organization grows organically from the founder's personality and values. That's great, but what happens when the company grows and a marketing team starts writing the emails the founder used to pen herself? That's when you'll be glad you wrote all this stuff down.

So what goes into a style guide? Start with some of the basic information noted above, and add from there. A simple Google Doc would work so it could be accessed and updated as needed.

A couple of important points to spell out:

Pronouns. Companies tend to be all over the map with these, using the first person ("we" and "us") in one sentence and the third person ("Abbadign Inc.") elsewhere. First person tends to be warmer and create a more accessible tone, while third person tends to feel more detached and paternal. Pick one based on your brand voice and stick with it. The same goes for your audience: Use "you" or "customers" consistently.

Jargon. I used to take a hard line against jargon and insider language—as in, *don't use it*. But lately I've rethought that rule, because jargon can sometimes include key phrases that are necessary to signal a shared mindset or to convey a depth of knowledge. Spell out which professional terms and phrases your company embraces and which it does not. Most important—and this goes for anything you write—be sure to use only terms that clarify rather than obfuscate.

SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF.

Don't think about your voice only in the most obvious places, like your website's homepage and your Facebook page. Take it further. Consider how you can use your voice as a differentiator in surprising places, like on your 404 page, email confirmation or "Thank You" page.

NOW, HERE'S HOW IT SOUNDS IN ACTION.

So all this talk of voice sounds awesome, right? But how does it actually play out? Can the words you use really help brand you?

Freaker USA manufactures and sells one-size-fits-all beverage insulators—also known as koozies. Beverage insulation is a pretty pedestrian category. But Freaker USA stands out in part because of its tone of voice, which extends across everything it undertakes.

Here's how the company describes itself on its "About" page:

"Established in 2011 and located in Wilmington, N.C., Freaker USA quickly grew to be the global leader of preventing moist handshakes and sweaty beverages. They aren't just selling you their fit-everything product, they're giving you an invitation to their party—a starter kit for a new lifestyle. The Freaker isn't a strike-at-the-wind attempt to get rich, it's the background music to a never-ending journey. Infusing life, style and functionality into a drink insulator."

Think about that for a minute. Freaker could have described itself with a bit more utility, something like this:

"This drink insulator keeps your bottled beverages colder longer, plus folds flat for maximum pocket portability. It fits your bottle or can like a glove and is classier than a brown bag."

In fact, that's a bit of website copy I co-opted from one of Freaker's competitors. It doesn't convey nearly the same brand story, does it? If Freaker spoke that way, you wouldn't get a sense of what makes the company unique.

Remember how I mentioned sweating the small stuff? This is an excerpt from Freaker's email subscription confirmation:

"If you received this email by a whoopsies, simply delete it. As long as you don't click the confirmation link above, we won't haunt you with a subscription to our ass-kicking newsletter. You won't be delivered weekly sales and giveaways right to your inbox. You will never know love. Just delete this email and carry on like nothing here ever happened. OKAY LOVE YOU BYE!"

Your company might not be as quirky as Freaker USA, and that's OK. The point, more broadly, is this: What's your own brand voice? And does it clearly reflect what makes you you?

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| ASK A PRO |

Interview chops

Q: What three questions should I ask every job candidate?



A: Kevin Lust, director of the Small Business Development Center in Springfield, Ill., advises hiring managers across industries to ask these essential questions.

1. Why should we hire you? Sure, it's a cliché, but the question's strength is in the follow-up. "The phrase 'Tell me' is a powerful one," Lust says. "Tell me more about that. Give me some specific examples."

2. How would you train someone to do this job? "It gives them an opportunity to share their technical expertise," Lust says. "Even something as simple as, 'Tell me how to be a server at a restaurant.'"

3. What did you get done at your last job? Rather than a recitation of duties, Lust explains, "you're looking for that person who demonstrates ownership in a previous role. Somebody who understands the end result of their work and who speaks to the notion of a larger mission." —Christopher Hann

Are you talking to me?

Dealing with the feedback-averse

By Gael O'Brien

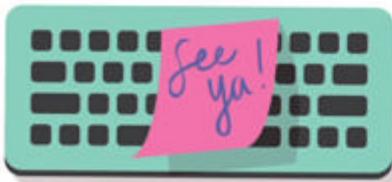
Q: I have an employee who's bright and confident but has a chip on his shoulder that makes him resistant to feedback. What's the best way to talk to him about his work?

A: Arrogance often masks fear. If you haven't established a basis for trust in your relationship, it will be difficult for your employee to see that perceived criticisms are intended to support his success in the company. Though he needs to shift his attitude and learn how to accept feedback, he's not the only one who may need to make a change.

It's essential that you take a look at how you demonstrate empathy and clarify what is expected of him. That may reduce the fear sufficiently so he can hear what you are saying. Also, make sure your feedback isn't of the drive-by variety (especially when other employees are within earshot) and that, in addition to pointing out areas for growth, you acknowledge the value of what he brings to the table.

In *Thanks for the Feedback*, authors Douglas Stone and Sheila Heen explain that the obvious—but often neglected—way to give actionable feedback is to be specific and clear about what the employee needs to do differently and, most important, why. It's also necessary to fill him in on how to achieve better outcomes.

JARGON



deciuit (v.)

DEFINITION: To fire or lay off a recently hired staff member.

USAGE: That new programmer the hiring firm recommended? He's a little wack-a-doodle. I could almost handle his pajamas-as-workwear thing, but that howling he does after writing a challenging line of code? Let's decruit him, pronto.

can as they're plugged into whatever departments need extra hands. (And you need to realize that using unpaid labor to do jobs you would otherwise pay someone for could result in fines and give your lawyer major heartburn.)

Since mentoring is at the heart of any internship, check in with your team before you advertise for interns. Would your employees enjoy teaching the interns about your industry and company, as well as supervising their work? Or would they feel it's a burden? Some team members who enjoy working with young people (or who may have had children whose career choices were positively influenced by internships) may consider the opportunity a perk and a great way to give back, which in turn can energize their own work.

If you go forward, make sure prospective interns know exactly what is expected of them and what they can expect in return for their work. Unsure about how to structure an internship? Check out naceweb.org, the website of the National Association of Colleges and Employers, or contact a local college's career center for suggestions.

Gael O'Brien is publisher of *The Week in Ethics* and founder of Strategic Opportunities Group. @GaelOBrien



DO YOU HAVE AN ETHICAL DILEMMA?

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INNOVATORS

DIGITAL STAR



Making branding magic:
Just another day at the office
for Oliver Luckett (center)
and theAudience crew.

THEAUDIENCE IS CONNECTING BRANDS AND CUSTOMERS ACROSS SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS VIA INFLUENCERS—THE YOUTUBE AND INSTAGRAM CELEBRITIES BELOVED BY MILLENNIAL CONSUMERS. HERE'S HOW THIS DIGITAL AGENCY AND ITS CORPORATE CLIENT BASE ARE CASHING IN ON A UNIQUE EMOTIONAL CONNECTION.

BY JASON ANKEY • PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARC ROYCE

POWER



Three days after time expired on Super Bowl XLIX, Oliver Luckett still can't wrap his head around how badly they blew it. His frustration has nothing to do with the Seattle Seahawks snatching defeat from the jaws of victory and everything to do with halftime-show headliner Katy Perry's failure to exploit her moment in the spotlight to connect with fans via social media.

In the hours leading up to her performance, which drew a record 118.5 million U.S. viewers, Perry tweeted only three times to her 65 million Twitter followers. Other social platforms got no love at all. >>>

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INNOVATORS

This, Luckett contends, is heresy. "Shame on her. Look at her Facebook page—not one mention of the Super Bowl! It's unbelievable," he says, shaking his head as he scrolls the MacBook screen in front of him. "The night of the Super Bowl, I sent her page to the execs at Universal [Music Group, Perry's record company] and said, 'Guys, y'all need to be fired. You're embarrassing yourselves.' Her fans wanted to interact with her. Where are the Instagram photos? Show me her inspirations. Show me something. Get people excited."

Luckett knows that even the smallest scrap of content—a clever tweet, a Vine video, an image filtered through the Instagram prism—can have a massive and long-lasting impact across the social landscape. TheAudience, the Hollywood-based media publishing startup he founded in 2011, is cashing in on this fact with a new kind of celebrity endorsement that aligns corporate clients with social media tastemakers and trendsetters—the digitally savvy teens and twentysomethings who've leveraged YouTube, Snapchat and other platforms to catapult to global fame. Some are fashion models, some are DJs, some are extreme athletes, and some have no discernible skills at all. But they share an uncanny aptitude for the art of self-promotion as well as an unparalleled mastery over social channels that most corporate advertisers still struggle to comprehend.

TheAudience teams with these social superstars, or "influencers," to roll out coordinated digital campaigns for clients such as 20th Century Fox, Sony Pictures, McDonald's and Ford Motor Co. Typically an influencer is paid to integrate a brand message or product directly into day-to-day social media activity—tweeting from a sponsored music festival, for example, or shooting a workout video dressed in the client's athletic wear. TheAudience works closely with each influencer to guarantee that content remains on-message and brand-approved, and implements campaign road maps dictating how, when and where influencers will share it.

"Really what we're doing is casting each campaign," says Rami Perlman, theAudience's vice president of talent and influencers. "We're looking at data and analyzing who is the right person who's hitting that target. It's not about who they are. It's about who's listening to them."

Influencers succeed where traditional advertising stumbles by establishing a profound emotional bond with their followers, Luckett explains. "They're talking directly to you, and they do it

really well. You know in a play, when they break the fourth wall and directly address the audience? [Influencers] do it all the time, and they keep it going. Take Acacia Brinley—she was one of the first non-celebrities to get to a million followers on Instagram. In every photo, it's like she's peering at you. She's really going for it."

Brinley, a teen actress, model and singer, was the first influencer signed by theAudience. The talent roster now numbers 6,000. Between the in-house creative team and the influencer network, theAudience develops and distributes some 6,000 pieces of content—videos, photos, animations and tweets—per month.

"Our definition of an influencer is someone who brings great content but also brings an audience with them," says Luckett. "The kids we represent are digital natives. They don't need a lot of hand-holding. We come to them and say, 'This brand wants to reach this audience with this story. Can you be a part of telling that story?' These are super-successful campaigns that get 80 [million] to 100 million impressions and millions of engagements. That's viral gold."

TheAudience is based at two offices located a few blocks apart on Beverly Boulevard. The sites house a growing staff of 150, as well as hundreds of pieces from Luckett's collection of contemporary art. An Anthony Lister mural adorns the exterior of the main office; inside, the walls are lined with works from the likes of Shepard Fairey and Jordan Crane. The *pièce de résistance*: a Kevin McHugh shark sculpture, encrusted with 76,000 Swarovski crystals.

For all the larger-than-life characters in theAudience's influencer menagerie, arguably none is more colorful or compelling than Luckett himself. A burly, bearded bon vivant, he spends his rare off-hours in the company of confidantes like avant-pop icon Björk ("She taught me generosity. She's so sweet and nice.") and London fashion eccentric Daniel Lismore ("He's my muse. I want to turn him into a DJ."). Equal parts CEO and celebrity, Luckett eschews boardroom platitudes in favor of speech patterns closer to performance art—philosophical flourishes, dramatic pauses and bursts of obscenities, all delivered in his Mississippi drawl.



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BREAKER, THINKER, REBEL,
CHANGER, EXPLORER,
IST, STORYTELLER,
FOR THE THINKER
ATOR, RISK TAKER,
VER, REBEL, HERO,
DSETTER, IDEALIST
UCER, FOUNDER,
OTER, IDEALIST,
TIVE, INNOVATIVE,
TEGIST, INVENTIVE,
MER, ADVENTURER,
ER, RULE BREAKER,
KER, GAME CHANGER,
DRER, STORYTELLER,
PTER, MAKER, REBEL,
ATOR, RISK TAKER,
VER, MAKER, CREATOR,
RULE BREAKER, HERO,
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YOUR SUCCESS
IS OUR BUSINESS

INNOVATORS

Clarksdale, Miss., to be exact. The son of attorneys—his father, Bill, was elected mayor of Clarksdale in 2013 and co-owns local blues club Ground Zero with actor Morgan Freeman—Luckett got a glimpse of his future at age 6, when his grandfather gave him a TRS-80 color computer.

"I learned to entice my older brother and mom to type," he recalls. "I could conceptualize what I wanted, and they would do the work. That's really what started my career, and I've been doing that ever since."

After graduating from Vanderbilt University with a degree in French, Luckett moved to San Francisco. He landed a job at telecommunications provider Qwest, rising to chief IP services architect before exiting in 1999 to co-found Los Angeles-based iBlast, a wireless data broadcasting network spearheaded by Michael Lambert, the former president of domestic television at 20th Century Fox.

Luckett left three years later and, following a sojourn to Spain, returned to L.A. in 2003, signing on with Declare Yourself, a nonpartisan, nonprofit online voter-registration initiative established by legendary TV writer-producer Norman Lear.

"We registered 1.2 million people to vote in nine months," Luckett says. "When you're providing a utility like online voter registration and you put it in front of someone who cares, at the moment that they care, it's extraordinarily effective. It's basically going to where the audiences are."

Declare Yourself inspired Luckett's next move: Revver, which launched in 2005, enabled users to upload their video clips and earn a share of resulting advertising revenue—a then-unprecedented step toward monetizing the online media ecosystem. Beneficiaries included Eepybird Studios, the video production duo behind the viral sensation "Extreme Mentos and Diet Coke," who earned \$50,000 during their first month on the platform.

Revver's meteoric rise led to investments from Comcast Interactive Capital and Turner Broadcasting. That's where its troubles began, Luckett says. "Revver was genius. But [investors] basically wanted to put the cable television model onto sharing video. They wanted to geo-restrict everything. We had to watch every video that came into the network to block it for copyright infringement. It was unscalable and untenable. I got kicked out of the company because I was so vehemently opposed to screening content."

LiveUniverse acquired Revver in 2008 for \$5 million, but by 2011 the site was no more.



Reaching new audiences:
Jason Mraz goes green for Ford.

"THESE ARE SUPER-SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS THAT GET MILLIONS OF ENGAGEMENTS. THAT'S VIRAL GOLD."

In 2007 Luckett launched DigiSynd with ex-Revver CTO Rob Maigret. DigiSynd anticipated theAudience by offering outsourced packaging, syndication and marketing to traditional content providers seeking to translate their properties to the digital realm. Funded by Greycroft Partners, Warner Bros. and others, DigiSynd turned heads with viral campaigns for Warner productions *I Am Legend* (the 2007 Will Smith vehicle) and the Harry Potter series. DigiSynd quickly extended its services to rival studios, and in 2008 The Walt Disney Company acquired the firm for an undisclosed sum, retaining Luckett as senior vice president and general manager of the DigiSynd subsidiary.

DigiSynd assumed control for Disney's brand presence across social media, managing campaigns for Disney Studios, Disney Animation Studios and Disney Parks and Resorts. For the 2010 theatrical release of Disney Pixar's *Toy Story 3*, DigiSynd created an application that fused social networking with commerce: When consumers bought movie tickets through the app, the software alerted their Facebook friends and generated a prompt encouraging the buyer to invite them to secure tickets of their own. *Toy Story 3* went on to become the top-grossing animated feature of all time

(before it was dethroned by another Disney blockbuster, 2013's *Frozen*).

Luckett thrived at The Mouse. "I didn't speak my mind until Disney. I didn't have the self-confidence or validation. Disney validated me," he says. "I'd had success before and made money before, but when [Disney chairman and CEO] Bob Iger buys your company and gives you a massive amount of responsibility to go change something, and you kick ass for him, you feel a sense of confidence."

But by 2011 Luckett felt he'd done all he could do at Disney. When William Morris Endeavor co-CEO and Hollywood powerbroker Ari Emanuel suggested he head up a new, independent venture that would help WME's celebrity clients navigate the social media realm, Luckett was all ears.

In its original incarnation, theAudience—backed by WME and investors like Guggenheim Partners and Napster co-founder Sean Parker (who sits on theAudience's board)—managed the Facebook pages and Twitter accounts of actors and pop singers while creating original content to share with their fans. Clients included Mark Wahlberg, Hugh Jackman, Charlize Theron and Usher; the firm also oversaw Barack Obama's Facebook page during his 2012 reelection bid. TheAudience's social presence for the



reunited Black Sabbath culminated in the 2013 release of *I3*, the heavy metal gods' first-ever U.S. chart-topping album.

TheAudience planned to generate revenue by landing digital endorsement deals for its celebrity clients. "We ran into some headwinds there, where even with big checks being waved in front of the talent we were supporting at the time, some of them were reluctant to do it," says Mike Drath, theAudience's COO and CFO. "There are all sorts of gatekeepers around them. They have conflicting brand issues."

Those obstacles don't exist with influencers, the team soon realized; what's more, influencers are social media savants who relate to their followers in ways that megastars can't. Most important, influencers work for a fraction of the cost. Not that they're complaining.

Brodie Smith, an American Ultimate Disc League player and Frisbee trick-shot performer whose YouTube videos boast 110 million views, has done "a handful of campaigns" with theAudience. "They've brought a lot of amazing opportunities for me to make a living doing this. Sometimes in this business you work with people who are about 'What's in it for me?' but Oliver makes you feel like he's looking out for your best interests."

TheAudience will attempt to corral conventional celebrities if that's what the client requests. A campaign spotlighting Ford's energy-efficient vehicles recruited singer-songwriter Jason Mraz, actress Felicia Day and health guru Rainbeau Mars.

"Large companies like ours are much more comfortable being evolutionary rather than revolutionary," says Toby Barlow, executive vice president and chief creative officer for Team Detroit, Ford's ad agency. "We needed to reach a new audience—one that hadn't connected with Ford, people who didn't know we had a green and sustainable platform. TheAudience helped us connect with them."

But make no mistake: Influencers are the stars of the show. "There's a new company every week that says it does what we do," Luckett says. "They don't have any fuckin' clue what we do. They think we still manage celebrities' social media presences. We haven't done that for a year and a half. It was a terrible, thankless business. Why try to move celebrities that are digital immigrants into it when I've got 6,000 kids that speak this language that can push anything and make it trend globally with a push of a button? We are like the puppet master inside of these [social media]

systems, and we work with these creators that do their thing every day, and we bring them funding. We did that to the tune of \$27 million [in revenue] last year. And we've doubled every year."

As theAudience has grown, so have its creative ambitions. Last year American Express approached the company about a project to promote the AmEx Serve prepaid card while illuminating the plight of the 70 million low- to middle-income American citizens without access to traditional financial services. It's a demographic whose reliance on pawnshops, check-cashing services and payday loans costs them \$89 billion a year in fees and interest.

"American Express was looking to do something different. They didn't want to spend on a big TV campaign. They didn't feel it was an effective way to get into the communities or reach the individuals most affected," says theAudience senior vice president Tim Sovay. "The way to reach them is through social. We have found that the audiences they were looking to target over-index on social platforms."

TheAudience recruited Participant Media, the production company behind the Academy Award-winning documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*, to create the AmEx-sponsored *Spent: Looking for Change*, a 40-minute video on financial inclusion filmed in Luckett's native Clarksdale and narrated by actor-director Tyler Perry. TheAudience launched a website, SpentMovie.com, and rolled out the documentary for free across the AmEx YouTube channel, Pivot TV and iTunes. The campaign encouraged viewers to share opinions on social media using the hashtags #Spent or #LookingForChange.

TheAudience promised AmEx a combined 5 million views. *Spent: Looking for Change* shattered that within the first week, with total views now eclipsing 18 million.

TheAudience also is increasing its investment in developing content and artists in-house, buoyed by the colossal success of "#Selfie," a viral phenomenon in 2014 and perhaps the quintessential expression of the Oliver Luckett aesthetic.

Recorded by DJ duo the Chainsmokers, "#Selfie" is a satire of the self-obsessed social media culture. Chainsmokers manager Alan Alpert secured a meeting with Luckett, who quickly grasped its commercial possibilities and commissioned a music video featuring David Hasselhoff, Snoop Dogg and DJ Steve Aoki alongside dozens of theAudience's influencers,

each captured in a selfie photo. When the "#Selfie" clip hit YouTube, the featured celebrities shared it on their social platforms. From there, it spread like wildfire. At press time, YouTube views of "#Selfie" were approaching 300 million.

"#Selfie" was the perfect moment at the perfect time, with the perfect sarcasm," Luckett says. "We made [the video] in a week. I willed it into existence. I just wanted to see if we could make a phenomenon out of nothing. It had 46 influencers in the video, and I knew I had viral distribution through them. It was built in."

TheAudience has broken other acts, too, such as teen duo Jack & Jack, whose "Wild Life" video Luckett directed, and Israeli DJ Borgore, whose "Decisions," with the memorable lyric "Bitches love cake," features Miley Cyrus. Both clips incorporate click-to-buy overlays encouraging T-shirt sales.

"We used to represent [electronic duo] LMFAO. They made more money off Party Rock Clothing than they did off their music. Everything was for sale in their videos," Luckett says. "So we made 'Bitches love cake' T-shirts, and we sold 46,000 of them. The video got 16 million views, and there were 181,000 clicks to buy the T-shirt. If you're a music artist, you can sustain yourself off of YouTube revenue and controlling your video and selling music and selling tours and merchandise."

Which explains why Luckett found Katy Perry's radio silence ahead of her Super Bowl performance so maddening. The singer didn't just squander a chance to generate fan goodwill; she missed a golden opportunity to generate revenue. Her Twitter feed and Facebook page never made mention of the virtual pop-up store Universal Music launched at halftime in partnership with digital commerce firm Delivery Agent to market exclusive Perry-branded clothing and accessories.

Luckett vows that theAudience will never make those mistakes—that it will maximize every opportunity available to brands and content creators, and originate a multitude of new revenue opportunities along the way.

"I think I've pretty much nailed the formula—where these brands trust us, and allow artists to be artists," Luckett says. "My lifelong goal is to build ecosystems where brands, content and consumers all work together to create sustainable businesses for artists. Social media is an amazing equalizer. There's never been a more incredible time to be a creator than right now." 



LEARN THE SECRETS
OF STAYING POWER FROM A
**162-YEAR-OLD
COMPANY**



GREAT brand?

By Denise Lee Yohn

In our consumer culture of shiny-new-object syndrome, it is increasingly unlikely that a brand will survive—much less thrive—for more than a few seasons. But for 162 years, Levi Strauss & Co. has done just that. The staying power of the Levi's brand stands out boldly in this era of pop-up stores, Snapchat-style startups and fleeting loyalty.

For perspective, consider that when Levi Strauss emigrated in 1853 from Buttenheim, Bavaria, to the U.S. and founded his company, there were only 31 American states. Another 32 years would pass before the automobile was developed. Among iconic U.S. brands, only Anheuser-Busch (founded in 1852) has been around longer than Levi's. (Coca-Cola came about in 1892; Ford in 1903.) >>

And yet Levi's remains a formidable brand today. Fiscal 2014 revenue increased 2 percent over the previous year to \$4.68 billion, and the company commands the highest share of the global jeans market. Retailers credit Levi's for having unique brand assets they can't get from other lines. As Gary Oneil, former creative director for J.C. Penney, explains, "Levi's has become a brand titan that scales across lifestyle, gender ... this allows retailers to cast a broad net that captures a diverse customer base."

Moreover, Levi's continues to be considered hip. Complex, a website devoted to twentysomething males, listed Levi's among its "15 Brands Hipsters Love," alongside Band of Outsiders and other indie designers. Sightings of Levi's-clad celebrities fill the pages of style and pop-culture media.

Shawn Parr, head of San Diego-based brand and innovation consultancy Bulldog Drummond, whose clients include adidas, American Eagle Outfitters and Nike, observes, "Levi's is like the Rolling Stones or Johnny Cash. They're one of the all-time greats who defy and define the category, and without them, the genre wouldn't be the same."

The secret to the longevity of Levi's actually isn't a secret at all. The company uses classic brand-building principles to maintain and grow its brand equity. These are fundamental ideals that remain the keys to building a brand with staying power.

COMMIT AND STAY

COMMITTED. Above all else, Levi's is authentic—and fiercely committed to maintaining and reinforcing that authenticity.

The company got its start by selling built-to-last pants to miners during the California gold rush. Demand spread across the nation, and as pioneering gave way to manufacturing in the economic landscape of the early 1900s, Levi's became the clothing of choice for the working class.

During the midcentury deindustrialization period, the company's denim became popular among



San Francisco's Market Street store.

rebellious youth subcultures. Its proposition as a genuine, original brand resonated with greasers and hippies alike.

In the mid-1980s, Levi's launched a campaign promoting its classic 501s, which rekindled excitement and demand for the five-pocket jean originally introduced more than 100 years earlier. The company returned to the effort again in the late 2000s.

"People love the original 501 because it is timeless," comments

Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara, Calif., will host Super Bowl 50 on Feb. 7, 2016.



Levi's CMO Jennifer Sey. "As a brand that's been around for more than 160 years, we have clothed a lot of people and been a part of many great, pivotal storytelling moments."

These days, *authenticity* is one of the most common business buzzwords and desired brand traits—and with good reason. The Authentic Brand Index (ABI) has shown that the stronger a brand's perceived authenticity, the more likely people are to become advocates for it. Authenticity, ABI's analysts observe, helps fuel success in today's markets as consumers search for greater meaning and sincerity from the brands they choose. People desire to connect with products that feel safe and certain. Levi's clearly identifies its core purpose, attributes and value—and then uses them as a compass for everything it does. This resonates particularly with today's influential young consumers.

"Brands that create purpose win Millennials' hearts, and brands that are different and authentic win their minds," says Jeff Fromm, co-author of *Marketing to Millennials*.

GO FOR AN EMOTIONAL RESPONSE.

The quality and integrity of Levi's products is unquestionable. The rivets on the jeans have become a standard around the world, and the signature red-stitched selvage and double-needle stitching are superior design details. But the company's

brand messages have made a more culturally significant appeal.

Starting in the 1950s with print ads featuring celebrity bad boys like Marlon Brando, and continuing into the late '60s with counterculture radio spots set to psychedelic music from Jefferson Airplane, Levi's sought to make a powerful emotional connection with its audience. In the '70s and '80s, Levi's turned to TV, capturing consumer attention with vignettes that were risqué at the time, including a commercial starring model Nick Kamen stripping down to his boxers in a laundromat. The spots inspired a visceral response.

More recently, in 2009 Levi's stirred viewers with an expertly crafted and beautifully shot campaign titled "Go Forth." The series of mini-films sets black-and-white images of a Hurricane Katrina-ravaged New Orleans against a soundtrack of Walt Whitman poetry. By celebrating the "brand for pioneers who are in the process of building a new America," Levi's once again managed to capture and convey a unique spirit.

In each of these campaigns, Levi's stoked passion for its brand without describing its wares or promoting product features. In fact, it could be said that Levi's advertising has systematically avoided selling its products—aiming instead for an emotional connection with consumers.

"We've been there with people for many of their great and defining life experiences—big and small," Sey explains. "From first dates to the first day of school ... our job as marketers is to facilitate and amplify that great storytelling to drive deep engagement."

DEFY THE TRENDS. All brands need to evolve to remain relevant. Levi's, despite the powerful brand equity it has established, is no exception. But the company favors maintaining its brand integrity over jumping onto the latest trends.

"What has kept Levi's in the forefront of the ever-changing jean world is their market research—how they test product with a variety of diverse retailers and use that

BUTTON FLY

The appeal of Levi's as an authentic yet contemporary brand is embodied by the button fly on its jeans. Buttons were used on the original pair of 501s, designed 20 years before the zipper was created. Levi's eventually replaced the buttons with a zipper, hoping to broaden the brand's appeal to female customers. But more recently, it reintroduced the button fly on the 501.



COPPER RIVETS

Levi's got its start as the durable workwear of choice of gold prospectors in the 1850s. The copper-rivet feature was created by Jacob Davis, Levi Strauss' tailor, who placed them at points of strain to make the jeans sturdier.

RED TAB

Levi's has worked throughout its history to distinguish itself from other denim lines. In 1936 it added as an identifying mark the red tab stitched with LEVI'S® to the right back pocket of its jeans, where it still appears today.

BATWING
Designed by Walter Landor in 1967, the red batwing-shape housemark, signifying the upper portion of the back pocket, acts as visual shorthand for the brand.

LEATHER PATCH

In 1886 Levi's introduced a leather patch branded with an image of pants that are so strong, they can't be pulled apart by two horses.

BACK-POCKET STITCHING

Since 1873, Levi's has stitched the back pockets of its jeans with two connecting double arches that meet in the center. It is the oldest known apparel trademark in the U.S.



feedback to address various fits, washes and fashion elements to stay current," says Billy Rudnick, general merchandising manager for New York retailer Dr. Jays. "But they never go too far into the gimmicks that have misled many good companies."

At times, this stance caused the company to fall behind. In the early 2000s, for example, the design team was late to move into popular new fashion directions like colored denim for women and tailored jeans for men. As a result, sales plummeted.

But in many other instances, Levi's was ahead of its time, especially in areas of social responsibility. Way back in the 1890s, Levi Strauss established scholarships for students at the University of California, Berkeley, and ever since, the company has pursued a mission that executives call "profits through principles."

Strauss' great-great-grandnephew Robert Haas, CEO from 1984 to 1999, launched a manufacturing code of conduct for overseas suppliers. He was also the first Fortune 500 CEO to extend medical benefits to employees' domestic partners and one of the earliest corporate executives to champion funding for HIV/AIDS research.

Adds Sey: "We invented the blue jean, provided the first-ever wom-

A sales flier circa 1899.

en's jean, and continue to innovate today based on consumer need with greener products, including the Water collection; products that support sustainable lifestyles, such as the Commuter series; and better-fitting, more figure-flattering jeans like the Revel Collection."

While most companies search for ways to modernize, innovations at Levi's often invoke the brand's history. For example, the latest



version of its visual identity features an updated logo based on the original batwing designed for the company nearly 50 years ago by Walter Landor. Other elements of the "new" identity include the shape of the stitching that has been on the back pockets for more than a century, a modernized rendition of the two-horse mark and the message "Patented 1873."

Marketing strategies also tie strongly to the brand's history and values. In 2013 Levi's held a series of concerts along the oldest U.S. railway route, with stops in small towns. Social media marketing communications, meanwhile, serve to educate consumers about issues such as water conservation, or to support social justice leaders, as much as to promote products.

Levi's recognizes that trend-following may be the simplest way to attract attention and raise short-term revenue, but following someone else's lead usually causes a company to stray from its own brand identity. At times in Levi's history, its managers learned this lesson the hard way. Branding consultant Parr says Levi's has "always got to watch that they're not trying too hard or to be something they're not. They've been at their best when they are comfortable being Levi's, leaning on the past, but being risk-takers."

A look at Levi's offers insight into the commitment, courage and consistency that goes into making a great brand. One of the nation's longest-standing companies, it thrives on its identity as an original American brand in an increasingly global marketplace. It represents individuality and rebelliousness while appealing broadly, and it offers accessibility in an industry that thrives on exclusivity.

The cultural resonance of Levi's has withstood the ups and downs of the economy, fashion trends and the business itself. Even more than its products, the Levi's brand was built to last.

DENISE LEE YOHN HAS WORKED WITH BRANDS INCLUDING SONY AND FRITO-LAY. SHE IS THE AUTHOR OF *WHAT GREAT BRANDS DO*.

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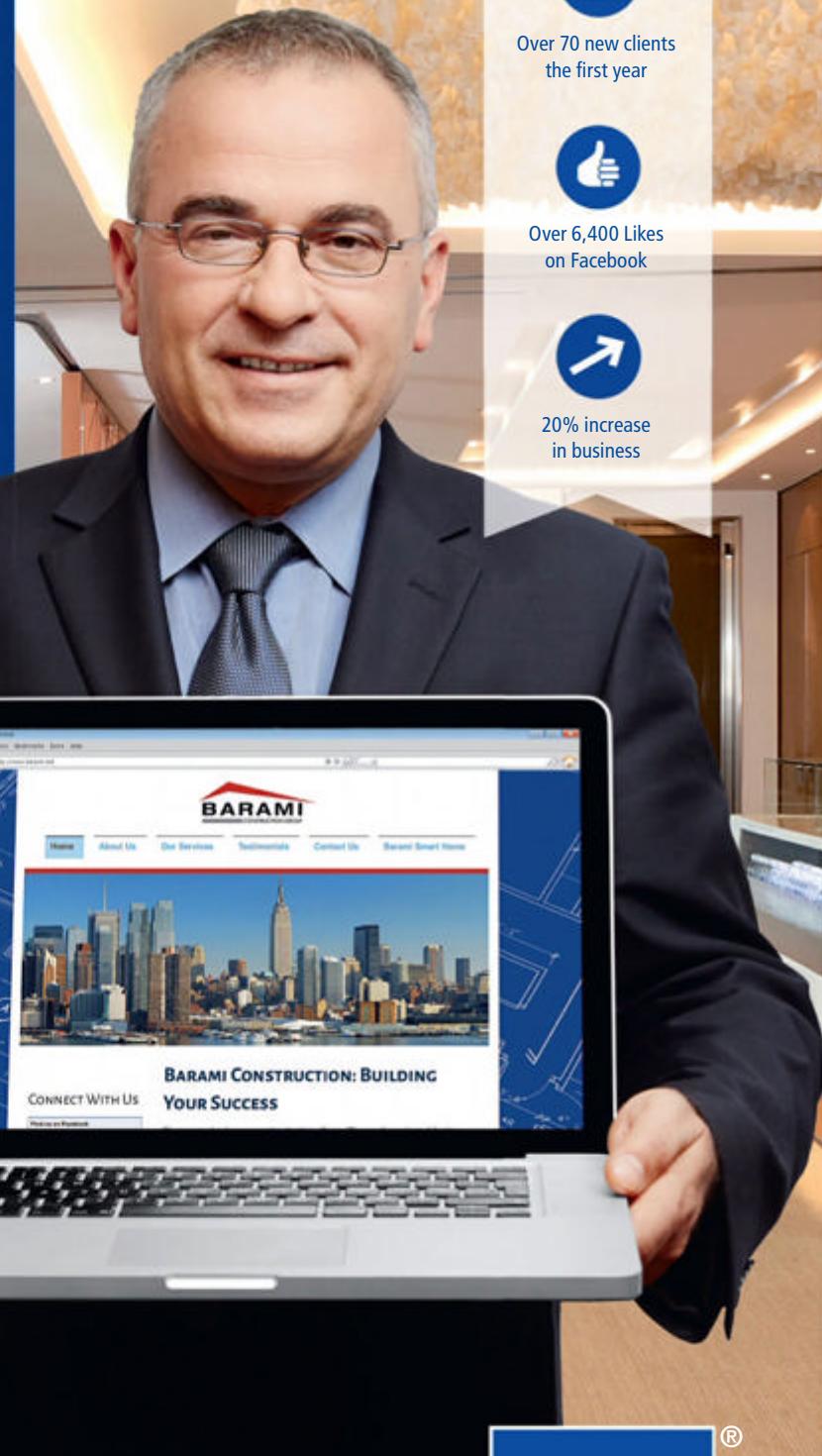
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The tales we tell

By Alina Tugend

It's one of the biggest buzzwords in business—**storytelling**—and it's how savvy companies are satisfying the public's never-ending hunger for content. With compelling characters, relatable plots and, most important, authenticity, these innovators are connecting with consumers, colleagues and investors on an emotional level.

“What is a story?” Andrew Linderman asks a group of students, most in their 20s and 30s, who are gathered in a Manhattan classroom for “Storytelling for Entrepreneurs,” a lesson in how to better pitch themselves and their products.

One student offers a complex definition straight out of a comparative literature class. Linderman, founder of The Story Source, a New York-based coaching and consulting company, shakes his head. Another student raises his hand hesitantly.

“It has a beginning, middle and end,” he offers.

“Yes!” Linderman says enthusiastically, writing it on the board.

For the next few hours, each student digs deep to figure out how to create a story related to their business, with characters, a setting, a problem, a climactic moment and a resolution. Then they work on telling it all in just three minutes.

Linderman’s class is one of many that teach an ancient art in a new way by applying it to a business setting. His students learn that if they want to sell their startups, they need to know how to project themselves and their products in a way that is both engaging and effective. And that’s not easy.

“We keep rediscovering and have to remind ourselves of the power of stories in a business context,” says Keith Quesenberry, a lecturer at the Center for Leadership Education at Johns Hopkins University. “We love stories. PowerPoint ruined that. Bullet points are not a story.”

Storytelling’s rise as the buzzword of the business world mirrors the increasing popularity of programs such as “Serial,” the free 12-part weekly podcast about a real-life 1999 murder that had been downloaded a whopping 40 million times less than three months after its debut last October. The program was the subject of endless tweets, reddit analyses, news stories and parodies. Listeners clamoring for a second season quickly donated enough cash to Chicago Public Media to make that a reality.

And take a look at the rise of crowdfunding sites like Kickstarter. What are they, really, but a forum for telling stories as a way to convince people to give money?

But storytelling should be seen as more than just a sales tool. Businesses can use stories to get clients to better understand the company’s work, to connect employees to one another and to management, and to give a voice to those who don’t otherwise have one.

When Marie-Reine Jézéquel, founder of real-estate company New York Habitat, hired Narativ, a training firm that focuses on storytelling, she wanted help making her workers a more cohesive unit. “I heard about [Narativ] on the radio and liked their depth of analysis and methodology,” she says. “It was very hard for me to delegate—I needed to build trust and a team.”

The Narativ staff coached Jézéquel’s realtors >

individually in telling a poignant story about a grandparent. Then everyone gathered, told his or her eight-minute tale and received feedback.

"After they told their stories, one by one, I told my own," Jézéquel recalls. "They really made you tell things you didn't want to, but they pushed you to be authentic."

It may sound like an odd business strategy, but Jézéquel says it worked to build camaraderie—more so than holiday parties or staff meetings—because people had their guard down but felt they were in a safe environment where they could be honest.

"It changed the way people related to each other," Jézéquel says, explaining that hearing one employee's tale of an ill grandfather altered her perception of that

What is Kickstarter, really, but a forum for telling stories as a way to convince people to give money?

person. A proofreader, she adds, spoke of a grandmother who was always finding faults, so "I understood why she was so good at her job."

Everything is a story. That doesn't mean, however, that everything is a *good* story. Just as many people can cook, there's a difference between slapping together a grilled cheese sandwich and finesseing a five-star meal. And like cooking, effective stories have recipes—or formulas—but they shouldn't be formulaic. It's tricky.

Paul J. Zak, a professor of economics, psychology and management at Claremont Graduate University, has been studying the reasons those nuances can cause extreme reactions in the listener, changing attitudes, opinions and behaviors. One of the keys, he says, is oxytocin, a neurochemical that is produced by the brain. It has been called "the love hormone" because it is thought to bolster trust and empathy. When the brain synthesizes oxytocin, people tend to be more generous, charitable and compassionate.

One of Zak's experiments aimed to test the reaction to stories that attempt to motivate positive behavioral change. Participants were shown 16 public service announcements from charitable organizations that anecdotally illustrated the dangers of drinking, using drugs or texting while driving. When people were given synthetic oxytocin, they donated up to 57 percent more money to the charities promoted in the videos than those who were given a placebo. More important, Zak says, those participants said they were less likely to engage in the dangerous behaviors shown in the ads.

In another experiment, participants had blood samples taken before and after watching videos of character-driven stories tied to charitable organizations; those who showed an increase in oxytocin tended to donate more money to the charity featured than those who didn't.

"Attention is such a scarce resource," Zak says.

"You need to grab someone within the first 15 seconds. People have to care about what's going on; stories need to be of human scale. For instance, 'Jane Smith was a customer of ours for the past 20 years. Last year she left us.' That's a good opening."

Indeed, as most of us learned in middle school, stories need a dramatic arc—starting with setting the scene, building action, some sort of conflict or tension and, finally, a resolution. That's true for any narrative, from a Russian novel to a three-minute pitch.

Within that beginning, middle and end, a storyteller must be specific, honest and personal. "It's about connecting," Linderman says. "You need to be vulnerable and connect to the vulnerability of others."

One way large companies are putting storytelling to use is in getting staffers to understand the roles of co-workers in other departments. Storytelling can also help prospective clients understand what a company does, or convince them why the business is superior to its competitors.

Kevin Allison, founder of New York's The Story Studio and host of *Risk!*, a live stage show and podcast of "true tales, boldly told," tells of a workshop he conducted for an agency that creates software for doctors.

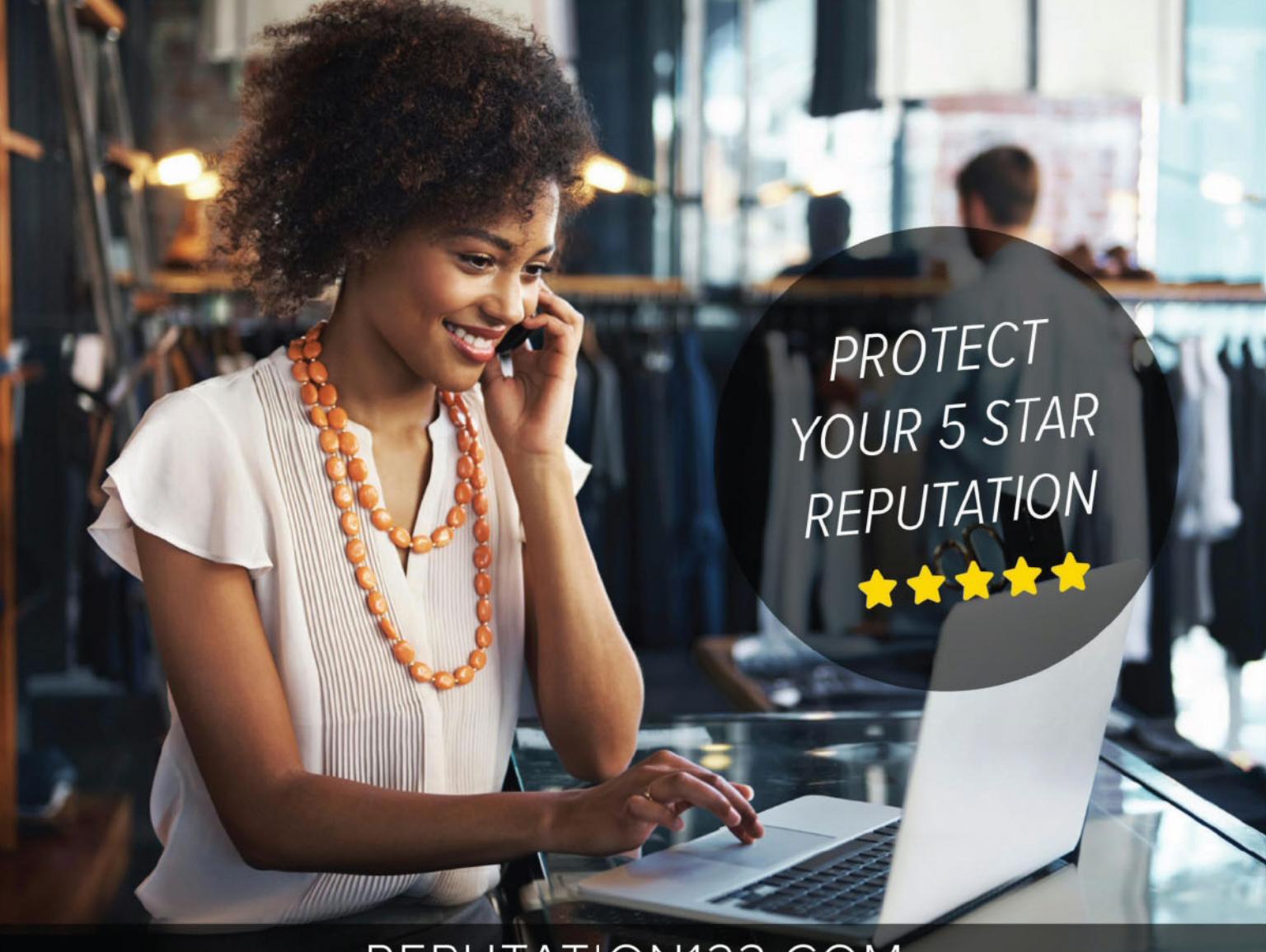
"They wanted to communicate in a very human way the technical process that doctors might not understand," he says. "I worked with them for four to five hours sharing stories and then brainstormed with them about the most emotional, heartfelt, frustrating moments in their careers, to the point where they could say, 'Ah, this is what I can pull out of it to convince potential clients we're not just another tech agency.'"

One woman told of a client, a warm and personable doctor, who was having difficulty with the software. "She spent a weekend walking him through the software, and he phoned her saying she had really made his life easier," Allison says. "Tragically, the doctor was killed in a car accident a week after that. So the fact that he called meant so much—she'll always remember that. The story brought tears to the eyes of a lot of people in the room."

Storytelling can be an especially effective tactic for philanthropic organizations. Brett Davidson, director of the Health Media Initiative at the Open Society Foundations, a nonprofit that focuses on public health and human rights around the world, has used Narativ trainers. "People we work with are used to telling one particular story about themselves," he says. "Narativ helped us realize that people have many stories. It can help break down stereotypes."

So is storytelling just another fashionable business trend? "It does seem like it's been a bit of a fad in the last couple of years," Davidson says, although he believes it's one that could last. "But it has to be approached in a meaningful way. People can't feel like they're being manipulated. It has to be honest."

ALINA TUGEND WRITES THE "SHORTCUTS" COLUMN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES AND IS THE AUTHOR OF BETTER BY MISTAKE: THE UNEXPECTED BENEFITS OF BEING WRONG.

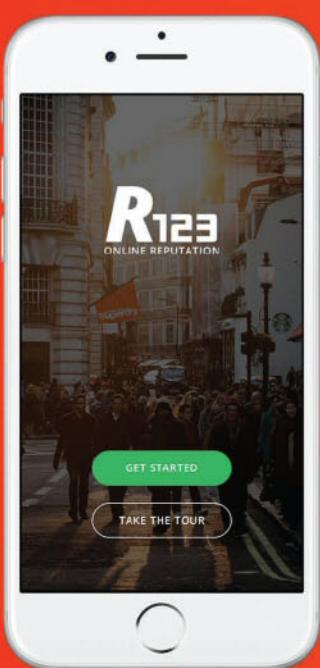


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BY HAMISH CAMPBELL

a VISUAL- purpose

Looking for a logo? Build a brand instead.

When business owners embark on the design process, they may commission a logo, but what they're really seeking is a brand. Because the brand—not the logo—is what consumers will interact and fall in love with and the reason they'll stick around.

One irony of design—the role of which is to make everyday experiences easier and more intuitive—is the lack of clarity in terminology. Design-speak

can get fuzzy. So what exactly does it mean for a business to commission a logo, brand or brand identity?

A logo is the mark that makes a company identifiable, much as names give people a place in the world. A brand is a company's purpose, visualized; it is the heart and soul of the business, encapsulating its truth in a desirable way. A brand identity is the expression of a business and can be flexible and evolutionary,

changing as the company grows.

The strongest brands are built by leaders who go beyond a logo; they utilize the full breadth of design thinking to add flesh to a business, transforming it into something that comes to life.

To help illustrate the point, here are five examples of organizations big and small that have used design to go beyond a great mark to create truly robust brands.



The People's Supermarket

This community co-op in London was inspired in part by Brooklyn's Park Slope Food Coop—but didn't adopt its crunchy aesthetic. Instead, the branding for The People's Supermarket, created by London-based Unreal, showcases the market's democratic and communal nature.

The brand's tagline, "For the people, by

the people," is emphasized by an approachable sunny-yellow palette that extends across products, marketing materials and offshoot brands like The People's Kitchen and The People's Cafe.

And the most clever part? Above the word mark is an intentional design tool: a shape reminiscent of the punched-

out hole that allows retailers to hang packaged goods, representing the modesty and democracy of a common marketplace. All told, Unreal produced a brand identity for The People's Supermarket that is bold, impactful and enticing, creating a desirable expression for the responsibly sourced food movement.

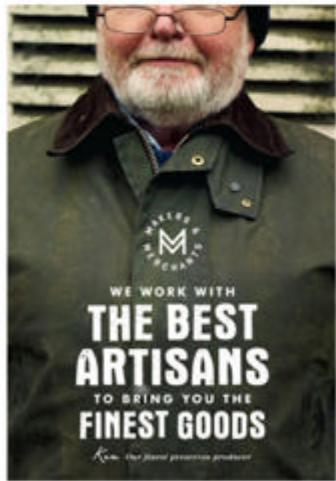


Makers & Merchants

Designers often hear that they should "make the logo bigger," but the best brands display subtlety. U.K.-based Makers & Merchants creates a range of food and home goods made in partnership with artisans around the world. The challenge for branding such a project is in how to unify numerous products in a cohesive way, without losing the integrity and uniqueness of each crafted item.

To address this challenge, London-based Horse Studio created a branding portfolio that explores multiple patterns, textures and styles, all unified by a strict red palette. This allows the brand to take on bits and pieces of the heritage or inspiration behind each product without stepping outside the bounds of the portfolio, proving that ranges don't necessarily need to "brand block"—a design tactic for creating shelf impact using graphics that appear to travel from pack to pack—to be noticed.

And that "make the logo bigger" nonsense? Makers & Merchants' modest mark is discreetly placed on each item in a manner that's organic and unobtrusive.

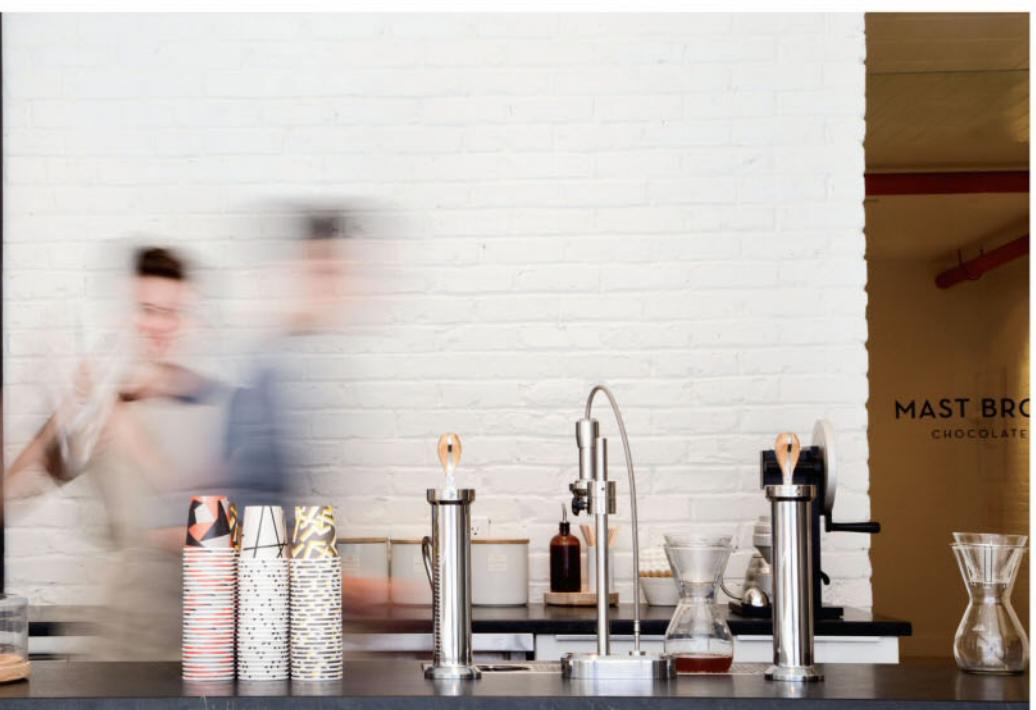


Mast Brothers Chocolate

For what started as a small family business in Brooklyn, Mast Brothers Chocolate has built an incredibly strong brand. No frilly, indulgent candy bars here—Rick and Michael Mast take their chocolate seriously. The logo is spare and simple; the copy that surrounds the brand speaks to the science, sourcing and craft behind the products; and the packaging makes each chocolate bar into a work of art.

Each pattern is unique to the flavor of the bar around which it's wrapped, discreetly referencing the chocolate's creation. For example, a bar made in conjunction with Stumptown Coffee a few years back was adorned with a pattern of bicycles as a tribute to the bike-loving culture shared by Brooklyn and Stumptown's base in Portland, Ore. The duo's new collaboration features vintage motorcycles, another cultural commonality. To add even more authenticity to an already earnest brand, the packaging is also invisibly tied to family heritage, as family members, friends and staff design many of the beautiful patterns.

All great companies must grow, but Mast Brothers has smartly retained its brand throughout expansion. Its new Brooklyn "brew bar," for example, "dedicated to the craft of brewed chocolate beverages," incorporates beloved Mast Brothers patterns on cups and packaging that pleasantly offset the space's otherwise spare aesthetic.





City of Melbourne

Creating a brand for a major city is no easy task, especially one as culturally and politically diverse as Melbourne, Australia. Local agency Landor devised a design system for the City of Melbourne Council that's a great example of the "head, heart and soul" approach to branding.

An edgy "M" changes color and pattern for each city initiative, government entity or program, and the geometric style that roots these patterns extends beyond the logo as a secondary language on signage, collateral and advertisements. By creating a flexible system that is both recognizable and malleable enough to encompass a wide range of needs, the brand can evolve as the city evolves around it.

The system in its entirety acts as both a guide to visitors and a reminder to residents that Melbourne is unified and a lively place to live. In its breadth, the branding for Melbourne portrays the city as vibrant, modern and progressive.

The Girl + The Bull

A great restaurant shouldn't need incredible design to help it shine; its food should do the shining for it. That said, when a business combines great food and great design, it's a place worth spending time. The Girl + The Bull is a restaurant in Parañaque City, Philippines, whose branding, created by Manila-based Serious Studio, reflects not only the warmth of the cooking but the connection between chefs and their ingredients.

Silhouettes of a girl and a bull face off on stationery and menus, reminding consumers of the provenance of their food and the talented people who make it. Classical etching brings a homey feel to the brand's illustrations, and photography brings the brand collateral to life. As an added touch, the restaurant's website incorporates tiny bits of film, creating a moving quality that makes viewers feel as if they're sitting in a friend's kitchen. The warmth of the brand and the caliber of the food are a winning combination.



These companies showcase the power of a great brand idea richly expressed through strategic design thinking. So, the next time you consider commissioning a logo, remember that it is actually a well-executed brand that brings your business's personality to life and drives an emotional connection with your consumers.

HAMISH CAMPBELL IS CREATIVE DIRECTOR AT PEARLFISHER IN NEW YORK.

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E CHANGER, EXPLORER,
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D, TRENDSETTER,
ATEGIST, MAKER
DUCER, FOUNDER,
MOTER, IDEALIST
TAKER, INNOVATOR,
DUCTIVE, INVENTIVE,
AMER, ADVENTURER,
ER, RULE BREAKER,
KER, GAME CHANGER,
ORER, STORYTELLER,
UPTER, MAKER, INNOVATOR,
TAKER, BELIEVER, MAKER,
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CREATIVE genius

HABITS AND TIPS FROM INVENTIVE PEOPLE IN BUSINESS

BY MATT VILLANO

Creative thinking is a tough act to pinpoint—it is, at the same time, highly specific and wonderfully simple. Which is to say that it can be hard to practice and engineer. All companies try, of course. Some succeed only to the extent that their culture allows; others, especially those helmed by forward-thinking entrepreneurs, manage over time to inculcate creativity into their very fabric of being.

Within the context of these divergent realities, insiders agree that creative people in business share some highly effective habits. After talking with a variety of business leaders, we boiled down these suggestions to a list of seven can't-miss tips to facilitate creativity. Somewhere, Steve Jobs is smiling.



1

TAKE TIME TO RUMINATE.

Innovative concepts need to germinate and mature. For this reason, one of the most efficient ways to engender creativity is to simply give people time and space to think.

“When I need to go deep and ideate, I turn my car into a mobile office and work out of parking garages. I work in Los Angeles; we have so many of them. There’s no internet connection in most of them, and there’s no way for me to be disturbed. You can lose track of time. You can write. You can sketch. You can do whatever you need to do. Being interrupted when you’re trying to go deep can really hurt your ability to be effective.

“I call this process of actively putting myself into an environment with no distractions ‘ruthless prioritization.’ It’s kind of like you’re taking kid gloves off and saying you’re aware that you do better work when you’re not distracted. You’re being aggressive with yourself about guaranteeing success. The only downside to this approach is that when your laptop isn’t charged, you have to leave the car on to charge it. That, and I usually have to pay for parking.”

—David Hayes, head of creative strategy, Tumblr

>>>

"I give every idea time to 'bake.' It's a period of time when I'm not really honest with myself that I'm thinking about the idea, but I know I'm thinking about it, working it out in my head. Running is a great way to do this, when you don't even realize you're moving your arms and legs, and your mind starts to wander. For me, being in the shower is another great place to accomplish this. The best baking always comes when I'm doing something else. For some reason, it opens up my thinking. I get clarity. I can solve a problem quicker because the baking helps me get to the answer quicker."

—Mike Byrne, founding partner and global chief creative officer, Anomaly



2

FORCE THE ACTION.

Some leaders work their most marvelous magic when they're under pressure to perform. With this in mind—at least in the right setting—deadlines can be a boon to creativity and innovation.

"I work best when others are counting on me. So when I decided to make a feature documentary about the obstacle race phenomenon, I knew I'd need to manufacture some sort of external pressure to stay motivated throughout the multiyear journey."

"Enter Facebook. In the summer of 2013, I publicly announced my intentions, rose a bit of capital, started shooting and set about building a fan page. I obsessively created content—teasers, memes and such—and after cultivating 10,000 fans, I launched a brazen Kickstarter campaign—too brazen. It was more of a nonstarter, as I fell \$262,500 short of my \$297,000 goal. Still, thanks to the magic of very public promises, I couldn't bring myself to quit. And I'm glad I didn't. After bootstrapping this dream for the first 18 months, I found a production partner to help shoulder the load. We're scheduled to wrap production this spring for a fall release."

—Scott Keneally, writer-director, *Rise of the Sufferfests*

"We don't spend a lot of time with PowerPoint or traditional research presentations. When we bring stakeholders into the room, we set out to visualize ideas together. We have this approach called 'thinkmapping.' When we do that, we get up at a whiteboard and draw to make visual connections between insights and data. This process allows us and our partners to think differently."

—Michael Kantrow, founding partner, Makeable

3

DREAM BIG.

One of the best ways to inspire creativity in a workplace is to encourage colleagues that anything is possible.

"Creativity is not doing things the way they've been done before. A key to this is simply asking the question: What is your dream solution? That's the first step. Having no boundaries. Not thinking anything's crazy. Being open to ideas. There's a fine line between creative and crazy, but you can't even get close until you've asked yourself how you would want something to play out in the best-



possible scenario for everyone.

"It has become a question we ask every one of our clients before we get started working for them: If nothing was off the table, what'd be their dream? You'd be amazed at how approaching a problem from that perspective opens your mind."

—Jenni Hogan, chief media officer, Tagboard

"We don't hire people for specific purposes here. We hire talented people who we know are going to be passionate about the work. When these people come to us with their own ideas, we try our best to let them run with what they want to run with. We try not to say no. Instead, the way we look at it is, How can your special talent or passion fit into helping us solve a problem down the road?"

—Ozzy Jimenez, co-owner, Noble Folk Ice Cream & Pie Bar



4

CHANGE THE SCENE.

Routines are great for circadian rhythms but terrible for creative minds. Mixing up the environment can be a great way to spark new and exciting thinking.

"At the office there are so many distractions; there is this constant pull to get back to your desk and get back to work. My favorite way to have really creative collaboration is to mix things up. It doesn't matter where you go, so long as you go off-site. Sometimes we'll have meetings at someone's house, or a Starbucks, or in public spaces at hotels. Sometimes we just go outside. We even offer internal internships for people in one department to spend one day a week [for 10 weeks] working in another department, just to broaden perspective. Being in a new environment brings good creative energy. It mixes things up enough to get people thinking differently, and that's almost always a good thing."

—Michelle Kohanzo, managing director, The Land of Nod



5 WORK TOGETHER.

Brainstorming has had its critics over the years, but few can dispute that hashing out concepts and ideas with others makes the process more inclusive—which means more creativity across the board.

“We have a very open, collaborative work environment. I don’t like when I go back into the kitchen and it’s quiet. Our Food Innovation team includes chefs, food developers and academics who come from all over—East Coast to West Coast, big-city people and those who grew up on farms. They are in the kitchen every day, always around the food, challenging each other to build on ideas and having fun eating those ‘What if we added this/did that’ concoctions.

“Our partners and suppliers join us on a daily basis; often we even have a mash-up of competitors in our kitchens building ideas together. Creativity is about exploring, collaborating and pushing your boundaries of comfort. That doesn’t happen at your desk, alone.”

—Liz Matthews, chief food and beverage innovation officer, Taco Bell

“Collaboration here is not hierarchy-based or level-based. You don’t have to worry about what your superior says. You walk into a room and everybody checks their egos at the door. Once we’re in the room, we’re all equal.

“Even though I’m the CEO, we try to encourage an environment where someone two rungs down from me will be comfortable challenging me. Ours is a culture of ‘Let it out.’ Still, it is a fine line between challenging others and going too far. We always try to be respectful. We try to understand the difference between words that hurt and words that heal. When you’re collaborating, your choice of words can make all the difference.”

—Jeff Church, CEO, Suja Juice

6

LEVERAGE TECHNOLOGY.

With many remote workers and businesses spread out geographically, technology can be the only way to make disparate work forces feel like a creative team.

“We have people collaborating across continents—people in the U.S., Italy and Hong Kong are working on the same thing. Quite often we talk by doing email and sketches. Sometimes we do videoconferencing. This is so much more efficient than trying to write long emails.”

—Stanley Cheng, CEO, Meyer Corporation

“You have to invest in how you can be creative together. We purchased an online tool six years ago that we could not live without as a company. It’s called The Recipe Exchange, and it’s based on recipes and pictures of food and videos of food. Every chef in the company has to have all their recipes up on this site—more than 30,000 recipes in all. The idea is that everyone gets to look at everyone else’s work on a daily basis. We trade recipes. We collect feedback. Then we pick what’s best. The process creates a sense of community as if we all worked in the same kitchen. There’s no other way we could do that across 26 restaurants.”

« —Chef and restaurateur Michael Mina



7

BE FEARLESS.

It’s a given: When you’re pushing boundaries through creative thinking, you’re bound to fail sometimes. The best way to stomach this failure is to expect it, prepare for it and move on quickly when it happens.

“To succeed in business, you need to have a level of fearless play. For me, that’s all about understanding that there’s going to be failure as you create. You’re going to have to get your hands dirty and do things you’re uncomfortable with. You’re going to lose more than you win.

“As a creative leader, you need to show people that it’s OK to experience all of these things. You need to help them recognize that sometimes being creative is scary and challenging, that it’s not always going to be easy.”

—Valerie Carlson, executive creative director, SapientNitro

MATT VILLANO, BASED IN HEALDSBURG, CALIF., IS A FREQUENT CONTRIBUTOR TO *ENTREPRENEUR*.

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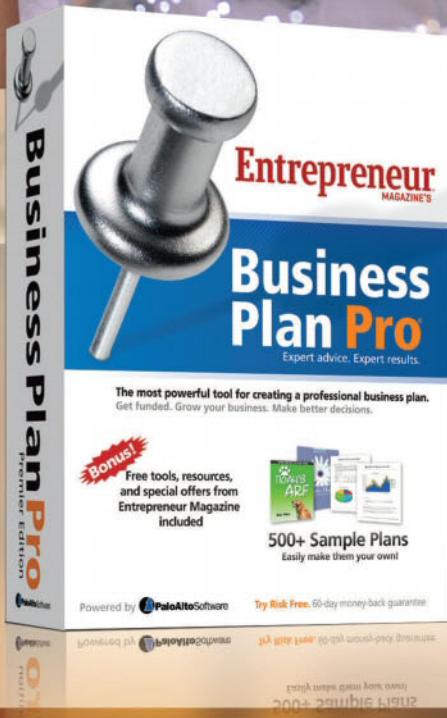
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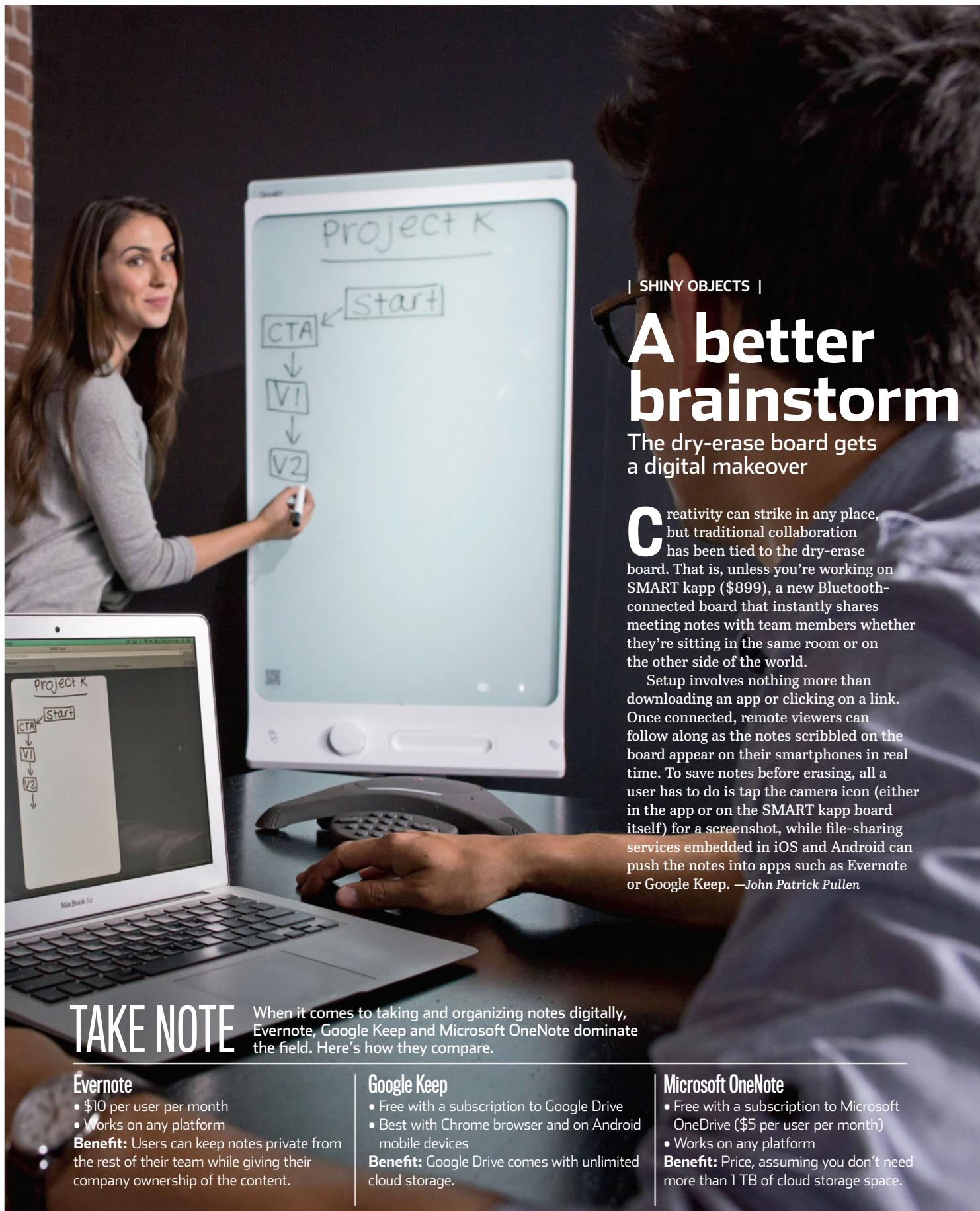
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TAKE NOTE

When it comes to taking and organizing notes digitally, Evernote, Google Keep and Microsoft OneNote dominate the field. Here's how they compare.

Evernote

- \$10 per user per month
- Works on any platform

Benefit: Users can keep notes private from the rest of their team while giving their company ownership of the content.

Google Keep

- Free with a subscription to Google Drive
- Best with Chrome browser and on Android mobile devices

Benefit: Google Drive comes with unlimited cloud storage.

Microsoft OneNote

- Free with a subscription to Microsoft OneDrive (\$5 per user per month)
- Works on any platform

Benefit: Price, assuming you don't need more than 1 TB of cloud storage space.

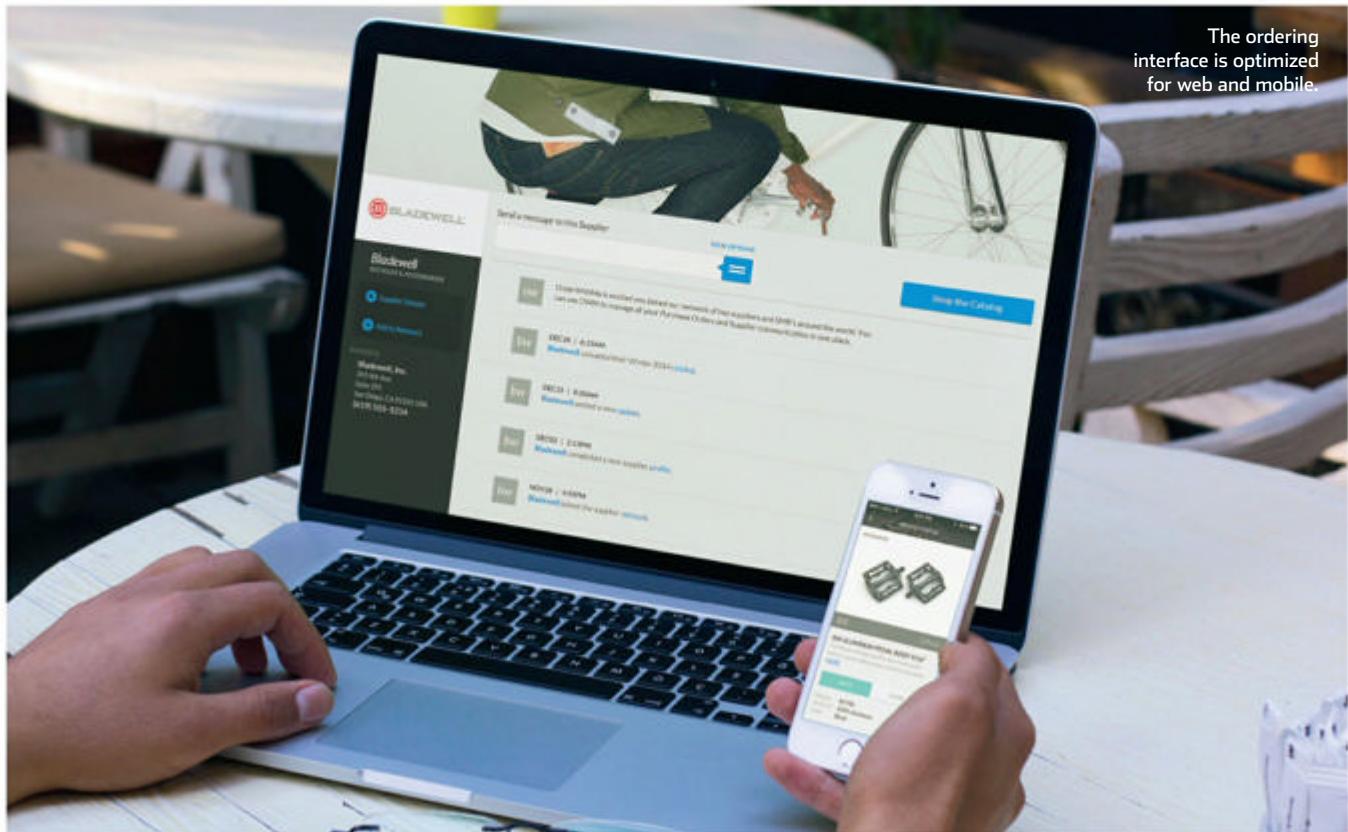
| SHINY OBJECTS |

A better brainstorm

The dry-erase board gets a digital makeover

Creativity can strike in any place, but traditional collaboration has been tied to the dry-erase board. That is, unless you're working on SMART kapp (\$899), a new Bluetooth-connected board that instantly shares meeting notes with team members whether they're sitting in the same room or on the other side of the world.

Setup involves nothing more than downloading an app or clicking on a link. Once connected, remote viewers can follow along as the notes scribbled on the board appear on their smartphones in real time. To save notes before erasing, all a user has to do is tap the camera icon (either in the app or on the SMART kapp board itself) for a screenshot, while file-sharing services embedded in iOS and Android can push the notes into apps such as Evernote or Google Keep. —John Patrick Pullen



Power in numbers

A buying club unites small retailers for better wholesale pricing

In 2006, when Jonathan Jenkins and his wife, Danielle, opened their first business, a women's fashion accessories store in Abilene, Texas, they worked with suppliers in Asia. But they quickly found that overseas vendors required high minimum orders on the scale of Walmart and Macy's, so the couple had to buy more inventory than they needed.

The store closed during the Great Recession, and the couple moved on to their next venture, a tech startup that focused on gamification apps for the Chinese ESL market. That fizzled out as well, but between their experiences in retail and tech and dealing with Asian suppliers, they came up with OrderWithMe, an online buying club that helps U.S. independent retailers save money by aggregating

their merchandise orders and taking them directly to manufacturers in Asia.

By joining together orders from bike shops, bakeries, plumbers or other small businesses within a single category, OrderWithMe can land better pricing and terms. The service is free; OrderWithMe makes its money by taking a cut of whatever discounts it negotiates with the wholesaler or distributor. (Jenkins declined to share how much.)

In the past year and a half, that model has helped Las Vegas-based OrderWithMe sign up nearly 5,000 customers, mostly by pursuing members of existing buying groups and industry associations as well as franchisors who can bring in multiple stores.

Beyond its purchasing power, the 50-person startup offers small businesses a

single platform to manage all of their wholesale inventory purchases, invoices and payments. That's what sold David and Bonnie Goldberg, owners of the Baby Blossom chain of baby stores in northern Virginia. To stock his stores, David deals with more than 200 wholesale vendors, each with its own set of rules. Some have catalogs that must be thumbed through; others require orders by phone. One vendor even requires that orders be submitted by fax.

"It's a highly inefficient process with no consistency and a lot of hassle for a small retailer like me," Goldberg says.

He joined OrderWithMe a little less than a year ago, and while he says it's too

early to know just how much money he's saving, he already sees value from the service. "If just half of our vendors are on their platform," he says, "it would save me a minimum of 35 hours a month."

Bringing that level of efficiency to small businesses has helped OrderWithMe raise more than \$35 million over three rounds of funding.

Major investors include Zappos founder Tony Hsieh and Advantage Capital Partners.

"This is my passion," Jenkins says, speaking from his experience as a brick-and-mortar retailer. "I'm not sure any large company would be as passionate about helping the small independent business as we are." —Mikal E. Belicove

OrderWithMe
has raised
more than
\$35 million in
funding.

Winner takes all

A universal POS terminal accepts every form of payment, for any type of business

October 2015 is a deadline that hundreds of thousands of U.S. merchants dread. That's when any business that swipes customers' credit cards must have swapped out its payment terminals with costly new ones that follow the EMV (Europay, MasterCard and Visa) protocol. Those who don't make the switch will be liable for any fraud charges that may occur.

This mandatory upgrade, which will affect almost 1 billion cards and 16 million terminals in the U.S., is a once-in-a-generation undertaking, according to Osama Bedier, founder and CEO of Poynt, a Palo Alto, Calif.-based company that has developed a smart payment terminal. "Think about it compared to the Euro currency change a few years back—that's how significant this is," he says.

Poynt's \$299 smart terminal accepts every form of payment that consumers pack, from Apple Pay to credit and debit cards to cash. Beyond its POS basics such as a card reader and thermal receipt printer, the terminal works as a beacon (see Ask a Geek, page 66) and can connect to the internet through Ethernet, Wi-Fi, or 3G wireless data signal. Its two programmable touch displays (one facing the store employee, one facing the customer) can be customized to the retailer's wishes. It even packs a GPS system to track where sales are made (think: food trucks).

"We call it a future-proof payment terminal," Bedier says. "No matter where the world goes, no matter what the merchant's or consumer's preference is, no matter what app or plastic card is getting used or what type of phone—here's a technology that works with all of it."

Bedier would know.

He has worked in the payment space for most of his career, including stints with AT&T Wireless, eBay, PayPal and Google, where he founded Google Wallet. That track record landed Poynt an impressive cast of partners, including Chase and accounting software giant Intuit, not to mention interest from roughly 1,000 credit card processors worldwide.

Currently running as a pilot program with a few thousand terminals rolled out nationwide, the product is slated to start shipping officially in June. Merchants will get a device powered by a quad-core processor to speed transactions, a dedicated security chip to handle the encrypted payment information and a tamper-detecting case.



But the software holds the key to Poynt's longevity. Yes, the terminal works right out of the box, but the company is working with developers on third-party apps; similar to Apple's iOS model, Poynt will allow merchants to download apps for everything from loyalty programs to industry-specific solutions, such as handling tips or tracking commissions. Bedier claims that hundreds of developers have bought the Poynt kit to start building out their ideas.

"The POS solution that a hair salon or a hotel needs is very different than a yogurt shop or a restaurant or a spa," he explains. "We want all of those guys to be able to build their industry-unique solutions and integrate them into our device with very little effort." —J.P.P.



BEST-CASE SCENARIO

Take it all with you

The Phorce Pro is a three-in-one briefcase, messenger bag and knapsack that packs an onboard battery with enough juice to keep your mobile office running all day. The water-resistant carryall (starting at \$649) neatly fits 15-inch laptops and, thanks to its 26,000 mAh battery, can charge that laptop as well as a tablet and smartphone simultaneously. Meanwhile, a Bluetooth connection pairs with an iOS or Android app to display battery life and prevent theft by alerting you when the bag is out of range of your phone. —J.P.P.

| ASK A GEEK |

Easy targets

Q: What are beacons, and how can they boost my sales?

Beacons are small, wireless broadcasting devices that transmit a data signal that can be received by a smartphone—in this case, the one belonging to your customer. Once the beacon and smartphone connect, a retailer or service provider can instantly deliver a welcome message or discount.

There will be 4.5 million beacons in use in the U.S. by the end of 2018, according to a report from BI Intelligence, with 3.5 million of those used by brick-and-mortar retailers.

For help understanding what that means for small businesses, we talked to Rob Murphy, vice president of marketing for Swirl Networks, a proximity-based mobile marketing startup in Boston that helps retailers and brands engage customers while they shop. —M.E.B.

HOW EXACTLY DO BEACONS WORK?

Using the Bluetooth low energy signal, they trigger an app to deliver targeted offers that are meant to encourage customers to buy more during their visit to your retail store, restaurant or business. Beacon marketing can also be used to reward frequent visitors and deliver helpful content to consumers while they shop or wait for service.

WHERE ELSE CAN BEACONS BE USED?

Wherever there is value to be created by delivering relevant digital content to a person who is standing in a particular location. This applies to museums, stadiums, conferences, trade shows and inside banks and offices with walk-in traffic.

WHAT KIND OF RESULTS DO THEY PRODUCE?

Major retailers—Macy's and McDonald's among them—say they are seeing 60



Large retailers see 30 percent purchase rates for beacon-triggered messages and offers sent to in-store shoppers.

percent engagement rates and 30 percent purchase rates for beacon-triggered messages and offers sent to in-store shoppers. In one study, 73 percent of shoppers who received beacon-triggered mobile content said it increased their likelihood of making a purchase during their store visit. And more than 60 percent of surveyed shoppers said that beacon marketing campaigns would cause them to visit a store more often and spend more money at a store. So yes, marketing by beacon really can drive up your sales revenue.

HOW MUCH DOES THIS TECH COST?

The beacon transmitters themselves are relatively inexpensive, retailing for \$20 to \$40. The real expense for businesses is the cost of licensing the software and the media expense associated with paying third-party app providers to create and deliver the messages to their mobile users. Costs for this new form of mobile advertising will be comparable to other marketing investments such as email platforms and digital advertising.

Small-business owners should keep an eye on developments in this evolving space, which is still in its infancy. It's only a matter of time before the technology and the costs involved drop to the level of being affordable for small businesses with only a handful of stores or locations. It's also only a matter of time before customers become conditioned to expect an offer to appear on their phone as soon as they walk in the door.

THE STAT: 69%

Need more proof that mobile is taking over at a rapid rate? Facebook derived 69 percent of its advertising revenue—\$2.65 billion—from mobile ads in the fourth quarter of 2014. That compares to 53 percent of revenue from mobile in the same quarter the year before.

Source: Facebook

Repair job

An app puts a handyman ahead of the curve

Handyman Ramon "Ray" Gonzales III admits he was living up to his profession's negative reputation: archaic business practices and scattershot reliability. Six months after launching Hey Ray Handyman in Nashville, Tenn., he was falling behind on trafficking and tracking invoices and estimates, communicating with clients and collecting payments. And he was showing up late for appointments. His makeshift mobile office—consisting of a dog-eared appointment calendar and looseleaf notebook—wasn't cutting it.

"The way I was running my business was really old-fashioned, and I was losing a lot because of it," Gonzales says.

THE FIX

Searching for a mobile app that could help, Gonzales discovered Breezeworks, an iOS and Android micro-business organizing program. For a monthly fee of \$20, the app helps mobile solopreneurs, small-business operators and franchisees (up to 20 users) manage scheduling, appointments, client and internal communications, invoicing, payment processing (via a dongle that plugs into a smartphone to accept credit cards) and bid and job status. In other words, it puts the stuff that all service professionals—from plumbers to photographers to landscapers—see as necessary evils into the one tool that never leaves their side: their phone.

THE RESULTS

Gonzales knew he was onto something good when he received an alert from Breezeworks telling him he needed to be at a job in 45 minutes, and that given current traffic conditions it would take him 32 minutes to get there. "I arrived 10 minutes early, and the guy told me, 'You're my handyman from now on,'" he recalls.

Admittedly tech-challenged, Gonzales says it took him less

than an hour to get up and running on Breezeworks, and only a few days to get comfortable using the program.

"It has saved me a lot of stress with handling appointments alone," he says. "It has literally saved me hours, even days, of work a week with my receipts, my invoicing and my books. It keeps me organized and gives a professional front to my brand that I think really sets me apart from the competition."

A SECOND OPINION

With its ability to coordinate, automate and track essential business functions and customer touchpoints in a timely, professional fashion, all via smartphone, a mobile platform like Breezeworks provides an immediate competitive advantage in fields that are "always way behind the [technology] curve," says Paul Sanneman, founder of Dream Business Coaching in Novato, Calif.

Sanneman, who consults with construction contractors as well as other service professionals, believes the hardest part about Breezeworks is getting the tech-averse to change their behavior and actually use it. "If you're in an industry that's slow to adopt technology," he says, "you can leap ahead of the competition for very little money, just by being an early adopter."

—David Port



PEACE OF MIND

Natalie Semczuk, digital project manager, Troy, N.Y.

"I work with up to four small web development and interactive design agencies, servicing about 20 to 30 clients at a time. After the horror of going through my first tax season as an independent contractor, I've been looking for ways to improve my expense tracking. I've used FreshBooks, Wave Accounting and a few other small programs, as well as the classic huge stack of receipts and a spreadsheet. After playing around with the estimated-tax payment area on Zen99, I found it was the one system I started to use and continued to use even while just testing it out. Input is super simple, and it tells me right away how much tax I'll owe and the total expenses I've logged. And it's free. Now I spend one to three hours per week managing my books—dramatically less than with my old systems."

—As told to Jonathan Blum

Q & A

| ASK THE MONEY GUY |

True profits

Q: How do I figure out my margins?

By Joe Worth

A: For decades, maybe even centuries, business owners were taught to shoot for a profit margin of 10 percent. I don't know where that number came from, but I can tell you it's meaningless. As evidence, consider that Amazon barely makes any profit, while Apple's margins are in the 40 percent range. Both companies, as you know, are considered highly successful.

Profit margin is the ratio of profit to sales. The profit part of the equation can be measured two ways: gross, a useful metric for determining

efficient use of labor and/or materials in production; and net, often used to compare the health of companies within one industry.

Gross profit is the difference between revenue and your direct costs of producing and delivering products and services (often referred to on an income statement as "cost of goods sold"). In discussions about profit—including diagnosing problems and identifying opportunities—this is the number that gets tossed around most. Gross profit can be calculated separately



for each product or product line, salesperson, territory, factory, warehouse or any other metric that will pinpoint differences.

I once worked with a distributor of food items that was stuck at a certain level of gross profit. When we broke things down, we found that 5 percent of the company's products were sold at a loss. The owner had the courage to raise prices on these products to profitable levels and drop other products entirely. We also selectively raised prices on some items and lowered them on others in order to move more.

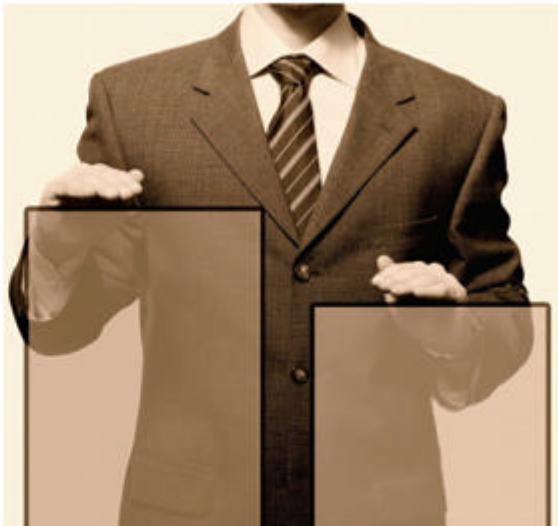
After a year, our overall gross profit increased by 5 percent of revenue. Additionally, the changes added \$250,000 to net profit, which is what's left over from revenue after all expenses have been paid. (Net profit is closely related, but not identical, to cash flow because some expenses, like depreciation, hit the income statement but are not cash expenditures.)

Net profit is the truest indicator of a company's bottom line, as it shows you whether your business is generating enough to finance expansion, handle contingencies and compensate staff fairly (and build your retirement fund). Much depends on strategic planning and budgeting. For example, you could enjoy healthy gross profit but tiny net because you devote a large chunk of revenue to business development.

Determining a margin target depends on the business you're in. Some industries rely on scale to make up for razor-thin margins; others focus on specialized products or services with high margins. Find out yours by looking at the prices of competitors and similar firms that are not direct competitors, industry benchmarks from trade associations and your own experience.

When it comes to profit margins, the only thing I can say for certain is that it's better to have one—even if it's 0.5 percent—than not.

JOE WORTH IS VICE PRESIDENT OF OPERATIONS AND PARTNER AT B2B CFO. @B2BCFO_NJ



| VC VIEWPOINT |

PERFORMANCE ANXIETY

How do you measure the value of a pre-revenue company?

By Sam Hogg

Over the years, I've heard plenty of entrepreneurs and VC colleagues talk about pre-product, pre-revenue and pre-profit valuations as if they can all be lumped into distinct categories. But while this type of analysis is part of the art and negotiation of early-stage company valuations, it is far from formulaic.

When I hear VCs spout generalities such as "The going rate for post-product, pre-revenue companies is \$5 million to \$7 million," I tend to think of Oculus VR, which was acquired by Facebook for \$2 billion before its first product hit the shelf.

When entrepreneurs come to me with the same sort of outsized expectations, I conduct a little drill: I ask them what kind of response they think they would get if they told their three largest competitors that they were selling the company in 10 days. Would the notice get shrugged off, or would it create a bidding frenzy? Ninety-nine percent of the time, the response is "meh."

With expectations tamed, we then get into a real conversation about valuation that respects the progress the company has made and the industry in which it operates.

The truth is that many pre-revenue companies are quite valuable. Intellectual property, early marketplace adoption and team members have little to do with early revenue but can certainly drive value. A drug on the verge of FDA clearance, an app with a massive

user base or an all-star founding team could be vastly more valuable than a profitable, established firm with little growth or dwindling market share.

So how do VCs value companies in lieu of proven financial models? Most firms have developed proprietary algorithms specific to the industries they invest in based on key performance indicators (KPIs). Many of these are based on the histories and development paths of companies that eventually tipped the scales to profitability.

For a digital media company, KPIs may be unique users or page views. For a software company, they could be downloads or subscriptions. A new gizmo's KPIs might be intellectual property and market potential.

The key is for you to figure out which KPIs matter in your industry and make them the main focus. This is all to say that you don't need to be *making* money to be *worth* money, but you do need to show a viable path to profitability. ("We'll figure it out later" no longer flies.)

If you can do that, you'll be surprised how many VCs are comfortable with a business that doesn't make money. Everyone understands that while it's nice to see that first year end up in the black, very few companies start that way. Focus on creating value; the rest usually takes care of itself.

SAM HOGG IS A VENTURE PARTNER AT OPEN PRAIRIE VENTURES. @SAMHOGGVC



Not so fast

A tax extension does more than buy you time—it could be smart business

By Steph Wagner

It's tax season again. No matter how organized I am, each year I find myself scrambling to meet the deadline. I always thought this last-minute crunch was normal—sure, I'd procrastinate, but high achiever that I am, I'd forfeit sleep before asking the Internal Revenue Service for more time.

However, given the complexity of the 73,000-plus page U.S. Income Tax Code, I've come to realize that not all of the 11 million Americans who file extensions are procrastinating. In fact, many are making a wise financial decision.

Tamara Sipos, a CPA and partner at Gallina LLC, a San Francisco-based accounting firm, says there are two key reasons it can pay to ask Uncle Sam for an extra six months to file your tax returns.

MAX OUT YOUR IRA

While filing an extension will not affect the April 15 deadline to claim IRA contributions, it does give you an extra six months to fund your Simplified Employee Pension (SEP-IRA). That cushion may be just what you need to save up enough cash (as much as \$52,000 for 2014 and \$53,000 for 2015) to fully fund your SEP-IRA for the year.

Moreover, an extension will give you significantly more time to reverse a change to your IRA. Since income limits on IRA conversions were lifted back in 2010, it's common practice for individuals to convert their traditional IRAs into Roth IRAs to take advantage of tax-free retirement distributions.

However, converting your IRA creates

a tax liability, and by the time you file your return, it may be a decision you regret (especially if the market underperformed and/or your income exceeded your expectations and elevated you into a higher tax bracket). But all is not lost.

"Thanks to an idiosyncrasy in the tax code, if an adverse tax situation was created by your conversion, you get a do-over and can 're-characterize' (aka reverse) the entire transaction," Sipos says.

IMPLEMENT NEW RULES

In late 2013 the IRS added Tangible Property Regulations (TPRs) that must be followed on your 2014 return. "Given their complexity, and the potential tax benefits to your business, an extension is likely a wise move," Sipos says.

TPRs apply to all tangible property and provide much-needed clarity for deciding whether an expense should be deducted or capitalized and depreciated. Every business entity, as well as individuals who operate sole proprietorships or have rental property, will need to adhere to the new rules.

"Here's the good news," Sipos says. "Taxpayers who have significant fixed assets with remaining depreciation, or real property, may uncover large current and future tax deductions."

Understanding how these regulations affect your business is critical to maximizing deductions while maintaining compliance. It's a laborious task that is going to take extra time to figure out in this first year of enforcement, so that extension may be necessary.

Sipos points out that to take advantage of these rules, you must file Form 3115, Application for a Change in Accounting Method, both with your 2014 tax return and separately to the IRS. Furthermore, there are annual elections that must be completed with your return in order to be in compliance.

Still confused? It isn't easy, which is why I'm filing an extension this year and happily paying my accountant to figure it all out. That way, I should end up with more money in my business and less going to Uncle Sam.

STEPH WAGNER IS A PRIVATE EQUITY INVESTOR AND A FINANCIAL STRATEGIST FOCUSED ON GUIDING WOMEN TO FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE. @STEPHLWAGNER





| STARTUP FINANCE |

Wanted: U.S. 'treps

Foreign programs are funding a new breed of expats

By the time he was a senior at the University of Wisconsin in 2009, Nathan Lustig's startup had customers, revenue and national press. But the company, a digital estate-planning service called Entrustet, lacked a scalable business model and had yet to turn a profit.

That's when Lustig and his co-founder, Jesse Davis, made a bold move. Presented with an opportunity to join Start-Up Chile, a program the Chilean government launched in 2010 to attract entrepreneurs to the country, they leapt at the chance. Under the program, Lustig received \$40,000 in equity-free capital, a one-

year work visa, office space in Santiago and a steady stream of introductions to the country's business elite, including potential investors and partners.

"We probably couldn't have gotten \$40,000 of free money in the U.S.," says Lustig, who raised \$125,000 in equity funds from friends, family and angels in the U.S. before moving to Chile.

Lustig sold Entrustet to a European competitor but remains in Santiago, where he co-founded Magma Partners, a \$5 million seed-investment fund and accelerator for local and expat entrepreneurs doing business in Chile. And he is not alone: An increasing num-

ber of financing opportunities exist for U.S. businesspeople willing to move overseas, courtesy of governments, private companies, seed funds, accelerators and incubators seeking savvy startups.

A CAPITAL IDEA

"Around the world, people look up to entrepreneurs in the U.S. as being on the cutting edge of technology and innovation," says Nancy Yamaguchi, a partner at international law firm Withers Bergman LLP. This reputational advantage can open doors to foreign VCs, strategic investors and other financiers, says Yamaguchi, who works with tech companies raising capital overseas.

Besides competing with fewer startups for dough, another benefit of looking abroad is that overhead may be significantly cheaper—as much as 50 percent less than in the U.S., according to Jeremy Hand, principal of Emerge Global Advisory in Medellín, Colombia, which helps expats secure financing in Latin America and navigate the local business culture.

Evan Tann, a native Californian who spent half of 2014 at Wayra, a London-based accelerator run by \$100 billion Spanish telecom giant Telefónica, agrees. "Even in London, where living costs are significantly more expensive than the U.S., engineers charge a small fraction of their San Francisco counterparts," says Tann, CEO of Cloudwear, an

online and cloud security company that nabbed a six-figure investment from Telefónica.

NEW WORLDS, NEW NETWORKS

Making the connections needed to raise angel or VC funds overseas can take time. Californian Kevin Yu, founder of the mobile cooking app SideChef, spent a year raising a \$1 million seed round in Shanghai. Even though he spoke Mandarin, Yu understood the business culture and the importance of having a local friend make introductions.

Aligning oneself with an overseas accelerator or incubator that offers capital—such as London's Innovate Finance, Milan's M31 or Shenzhen's Haxlr8r—is more expedient, according to Yamaguchi. "I like the incubators because they are a clearinghouse for local VC resources," the attorney says, adding that international programs provide more access to investors than their U.S. counterparts. Tann concurs, saying that at Wayra, "there was a constant stream of investors through the office."

But don't just follow the money blindly, Lustig warns. Those willing to take the plunge to move overseas should carefully weigh the potential markets, where they can afford to set up shop and—most important—where they want to live. "If you're going to go abroad," he says, "it should be for a reason, not just for the cash." —Michelle Goodman

HOW I SAVED ... \$30,000

Stephanie Angold, owner,
The Find, Reno, Nev.

"I was operating on a shoestring budget, so I decided to open my 5,700-square-foot upscale furniture store only during my most profitable days of the week: Thursday, Friday and Saturday. At first I was worried I'd take a hit in revenue, but I quickly saw better traffic than I expected coming through the store. I estimate that opening the shop three days a week saves me at least \$27,000 a year in payroll (not including commissions) and roughly \$3,000 a year in utilities. The biggest benefit, though, has been my ability to enjoy those extra days off without taking a hit to my bottom line." —As told to Grant Davis



Glow with the flow

Skateboarders stay safe with customizable lights

Entrepreneur: Greg Rudolph, founder of Board Blazers, which sells colored adhesive lights for skateboards, longboards and scooters.

"Aha" moment: The light bulb went on in 2011 when Rudolph saw a fellow Arizona State University student riding around campus with Christmas lights duct-taped to the bottom of his skateboard. Rudolph, then a sophomore in the business program, wasn't a skateboarder himself, but he recognized a smart idea when he saw one. He knew that skateboarders appreciate the ability to customize their gear, not to mention the safety benefits of being more visible at night.

"The majority of skateboarding acci-

dents occur while riding on the street, not at skate parks," Rudolph explains.

Getting rolling: Buoyed by \$1,000 in personal savings, Rudolph tinkered with the idea in his parents' garage. He scouted Chinese manufacturers online, sent them a lighting product he'd purchased along with dozens of changes he wanted and asked if they could produce his vision. Four months, several hundred dollars and countless emails and photos later, he had a working prototype. "I was very lucky that the first set of lights I ordered was exactly what I had in mind," he says.

Pimp my ride: Battery-operated and waterproof, Board Blazers attach with

adhesive pads, illuminating the ground below. Available in eight colors and sold in packs of four for \$24.99, each light is the diameter of a quarter and less than an inch thick. The lights can easily be turned on and off with a twist and can withstand spins, jumps, flips and other tricks.

Out of the garage: Sales took off after Board Blazers lights were featured at a 2013 SXSW event. Today Rudolph, CEO and "secretary of skate," manages a team of five independent contractors from an incubator space in Tempe, Ariz., an office he gained access to by winning a prestigious startup contest, one of several he has won since 2013.

Cashing in: In addition to selling through boardblazers.com, Rudolph's product is available at Amazon and a handful of stores in California, Florida and Arkansas. He says he has sold tens of thousands of light sets to customers in 15 countries.

The majority of Board Blazers customers are 14- to 22-year-old boarding enthusiasts and parents buying gifts. To reach skateboarders, Rudolph relies on Facebook and sends demo teams to events such as the Vans U.S. Open of Surfing. He also advertises on parenting blogs and posts articles about skateboarding safety (helmet, anyone?) on his company blog.

Future looks bright: Rudolph, now 23, graduated from ASU last May. Although he wants to pursue an MBA, he's not backing off Board Blazers any time soon. In addition to developing other skateboarding accessories, he's pushing to get his product into more U.S. retailers, as well as pursuing partnerships with skateboarding manufacturers and competitive skaters (professional skateboarder Ricky Rodriguez began endorsing Board Blazers last year).

A champion of student entrepreneurship, Rudolph gives talks at high schools and colleges. Although he found balancing his studies and his startup to be tricky, he says the crash course he got in streamlining operations and generating revenue quickly was priceless.

"I could apply what I learned in the classroom to the business, and vice versa," Rudolph recalls. "It was the best type of internship." —Michelle Goodman



Stoked:
Greg Rudolph of
Board Blazers.



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Kids play to lose

Investors bank on an app to curb childhood obesity

Joanna Strober didn't want to play food police with her son, who was having issues with his weight. Nor did she want to put him on a restrictive diet. She researched various tools, such as Weight Watchers and MyFitnessPal, but found they were geared toward adults.

So Strober, who spent two decades in venture capital and investment banking, decided to build a kid-friendly app and weight-management program to combat obesity and emphasize healthy lifestyle choices. She called her concept Kurbo Health.

"We worked hard to make Kurbo exciting, interesting and stigma-free," says the Palo Alto, Calif.-based entrepreneur.

Since launching in 2013, the pediatric weight-management platform has raised \$5.8 million in two rounds of funding from Signia Venture Partners, Data Collective and others. The app has been downloaded more than 10,000 times.

Despite the much-reported epidemic of childhood obesity,

Kurbo is a rare kid-focused alternative. Most weight-control programs for children are run at hospitals and require on-site visits, which can be an expensive and time-consuming option that many families can't afford.

"Why can't I do this on a remote basis?" wondered Strober, Kurbo's CEO. The company secured a coveted spot in San Francisco digital healthcare accelerator Rock Health in January 2014, one of the few pediatric-focused startups to be accepted.

The Kurbo iOS and Android app uses behavior-modification science, based on research from Stanford's Pediatric Weight Control Program, to help kids track and classify their food intake and exercise over a 12-week period. The app features game-style challenges that allow users to compete against one another to meet healthful goals. In addition to the app, which is free to download, members can opt to check in with a personal coach by text or email for \$25 per

month, or by phone or video for \$75 per month.

Kurbo reports that more than 80 percent of users who followed the program lost weight and/or lowered their body mass index. So far, 1,000 young people have enrolled in coaching.



Joanna Strober of Kurbo Health.

YouTube CEO Susan Wojcicki was an early believer in Kurbo's child-friendly program. "It's extremely rare for me to invest in any startup," says Wojcicki, who backed the July 2014 Series A round. "But with Kurbo, there was an

opportunity to help solve one of the world's biggest problems—childhood obesity—using mobile technology. As a mom with four kids, I've experienced firsthand how difficult it can be to get kids to understand and adopt healthy eating habits. Kurbo actually makes the process fun."

Strober's plan is to partner with healthcare providers to make the platform "affordable to everyone." A pilot program through a Medicaid provider launches later this year. "We are hoping over time that the providers will pay for Kurbo for the families in their health plans," she says.

But Kurbo isn't intended to replace parental input, and Strober stresses the need for frank discussion with children about their health goals. "Parents say they're going to hurt their child's self-esteem if they talk about weight," she says. "Anorexia is terrible, but talking to kids about their weight is not going to give them an eating disorder."

—Brittany Shoot

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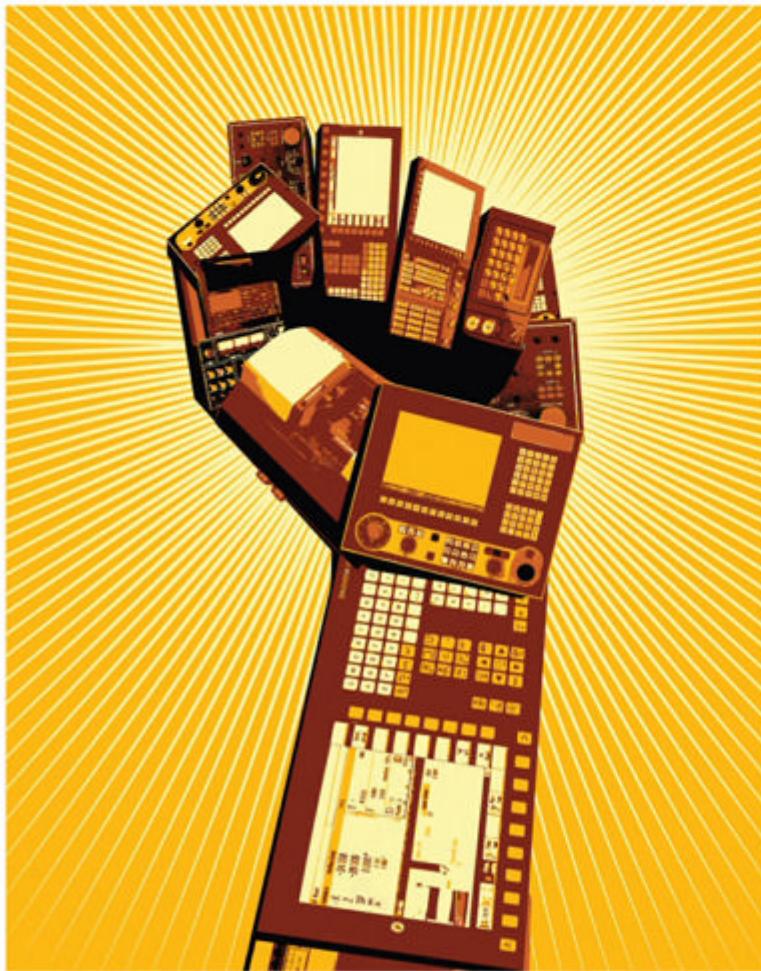
*Figures reflect averages for eighteen (18) affiliate-owned restaurants that opened before January 1, 2009 as published in Item 19 of our April 2014 Franchise Disclosure Document. These averages are based on a 52-week annual period from January 2, 2013 through December 31, 2013. Of these eighteen (18) restaurants, 8 (44%) had higher gross sales, 12 (67%) had higher food and paper costs and 11 (61%) had higher net profit percentage during the reported period. The financial performance representation contained in Item 19 of our April 2014 Franchise Disclosure Document also includes (1) average system-wide gross sales, average franchise gross sales, and the number and percentage of restaurants exceeding these averages during the referenced period and (2) average gross sales, average food and paper cost, and average net profit percentage information during the referenced period for seven (7) affiliate-owned restaurants that were opened after January 1, 2009 and before January 1, 2013.

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Wearing your tech on your sleeve

How savvy 'treps can cash in on the trend for monitoring devices



Consumers have gotten attached to wearable accessories that monitor everything from steps taken to hours of sleep logged. Silicon Valley venture capital firm Mayfield Partners invests in recognizable consumer technology and mobile companies like Jawbone and Fitmob. With wearables like Apple Watch and Microsoft Band now entering the already crowded space, Mayfield managing director Tim Chang explains what entrepreneurs need to know about bringing new wearables to market. —B.S.

WHY HAVE WEARABLES FINALLY HIT THE MAINSTREAM?

With wearables of the past, there was too much friction, too many steps to download and configure complicated software. Now these tools are ready out of the box to communicate with your laptop, smartphone or social media accounts.

Sensors and parts are finally cheap and widespread enough that a lot of companies can cobble new prototypes together with off-the-shelf parts that don't cost millions. We can thank Apple and Android developers for driving down the prices so that everyone can benefit from cheap sensors.

There's also positive social pressure and a growing acceptance that everyday people will wear these things as accessories. Nobody will blink an eye at a soccer mom wearing a Fitbit.

WHAT EXPERIENCE IS VITAL FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO GET INTO THE WEARABLES SPACE?

It's not enough for your product to have cool industrial design or just be a little cheaper or faster. I look for teams with a combination of software plus services, in addition to hardware. I'm afraid of hardware people with no experience dealing with app stores, subscriptions or third-party ecosystems. You've got to have talent that knows how to do those things.

The right wearables team in the future will look like *The Avengers*. They'll be ninjas in specific areas like crowdfunding, because they'll know how to get support before building a product. Someone will have hardware or device chops—industrial design experience in creating gadgets. Another will have excellent chops in software, apps and app stores. Someone will bring excellent direct consumer acquisition skills. The fourth will be outstanding in marketing and buzz-building. It's not enough to just have great features. These skill sets didn't even sit under the same rubric before, and founders building teams will be bringing in skill sets from many different backgrounds.

HOW CAN STARTUPS STAND OUT IN THIS INCREASINGLY CROWDED MARKETPLACE?

One way is to create a Trojan horse. A consumer will buy one product but then need a whole family of extensions and accessories, all designed to "talk" to one another. Companies like smart thermostat Nest and August Smart Lock are leading examples in upselling and cross-selling this way.

WHAT'S MISSING IN THE MARKETPLACE?

Most wearables are in a silo, speaking for and to themselves. The market is headed toward consumers wearing upward of three to five accessories, and someone needs to solve how all these devices and apps will talk to and coordinate with one another. We can expect a land-grab on devices, the data they spit off and which companies can and will attach self-improvement services like personalized coaching to physical devices.

WHAT NEW TYPES OF MOBILE LIFESTYLE PRODUCTS

WOULD YOU LOVE TO SEE AND SUPPORT?

Wearables will soon segment into hearables, ingestibles and implantables. It sounds far-out, but we're already seeing them on the market. I'm a new dad, and I predict babies and infants will inspire a whole new class of wearables for the parent interested in enhanced health monitoring and safety.



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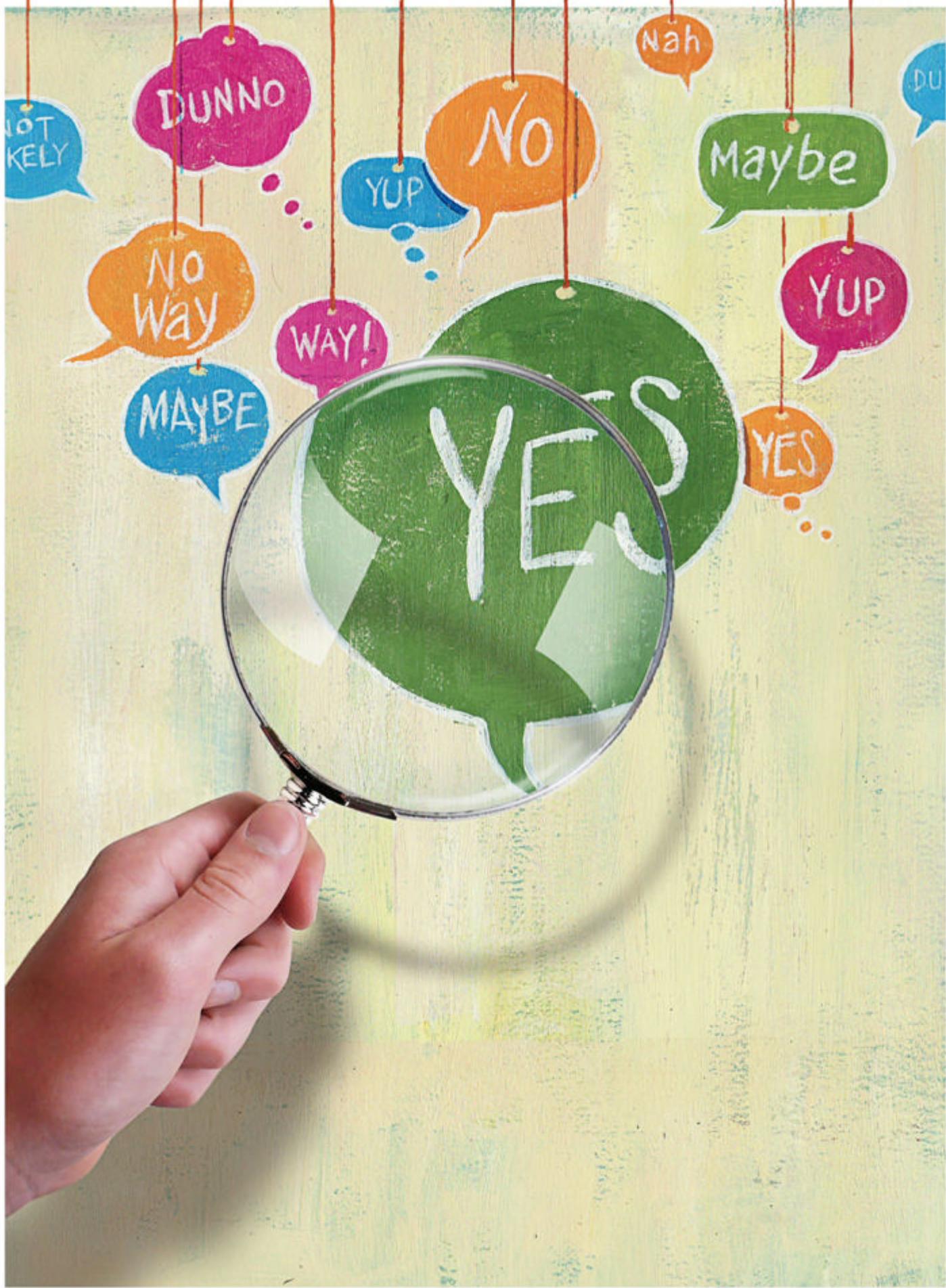


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*Based upon comparison of 2013 average revenues from: Sylvan (\$310K), Kumon (\$285K), Mathnasium (\$192K), ClubZ! (\$135K). The following were also evaluated and revenue could not be estimated: Eye Level, Grade Power, JEI, Tutoring Club and The Tutoring Center. Source: 2014 FDDs

HLC1719



By
Paula Andruss

WHAT DO YOU REALLY THINK?

No matter how great the concept, you need real-world FEEDBACK to see if your startup will fly. Here are five ways to evaluate your business idea—before it's too late.

Fifteen years in the home-improvement business taught Matt Fineberg that no one pulls the trigger on a big-ticket project—such as a new roof or windows—without first getting a handful of estimates.

>>>

LAY IT ON ME

When he began building his Philadelphia-based estimate marketplace, Bestimators, in 2013, Fineberg thought he knew what his potential customers needed, and how to deliver it. "I heard 'I need to get a few more estimates' daily for the better part of a decade, so I hired a contractor to build out a product to help homeowners do just that," he says.

A former design-build "aquascaper" (a landscaper with a focus on water features) who charged a consultation fee for his services, he assumed his new business would work on the same model. But feedback from homeowners showed him otherwise.

"A few people said they'd pay for that service, but most said, 'Why would I pay for something I can do myself for free?'" he recalls. "We took that feedback and made a very significant change to the structure of the company, eliminating the fee and making it free for homeowners."

After launching its redesigned product and graduating from Philadelphia's DreamIt Ventures startup accelerator last fall, Bestimators is seeing steady growth in users, consultations and customers. Under the new business model, the company receives a small commission from each project's bid-winning contractor.

Assessing and challenging initial assumptions is one of the most important tasks of a startup. But focus groups are expensive, surveys have low response rates, and attempts to poll people you know will likely give you answers they think you want to hear.

So how can a cash-strapped entrepreneur get feedback on a new concept? From confirming whether there truly is demand for the offering to determining how end-users want to receive it and how much they'll pay for it, here are ways to validate your concept and business model—and help define your direction going forward.

HIT THE PAVEMENT

For Fineberg, a boots-on-the-ground approach made financial sense. He spent a few weekends going door-to-door around Philly neighborhoods, explaining to homeowners what he was doing and asking for their thoughts about the service.

"If I can spend 16 hours walking around, and my biggest expense is a second cup of coffee and a pair of shoes, that's a lot less expensive than a couple thousand dollars for a market research survey that may or may not be effective," he says.

A few targeted questions to the right people can provide invaluable feedback. Try asking colleagues, mentors and prospective customers:

1. Would you pay for this product or service? If so, how much? If not, why not?
2. What other products or services currently fill this need for you?
3. How would you tweak or improve this idea?

The feedback Fineberg received proved instrumental in his company's pivot. "I just assumed people would pay for me to save them 10 to 15 hours and eliminate the risk of not knowing who to hire," he says. "Finding out that they wouldn't was invaluable and truly changed our direction. By eliminating the fee for homeowners, we boosted our signup rate by 50 percent."

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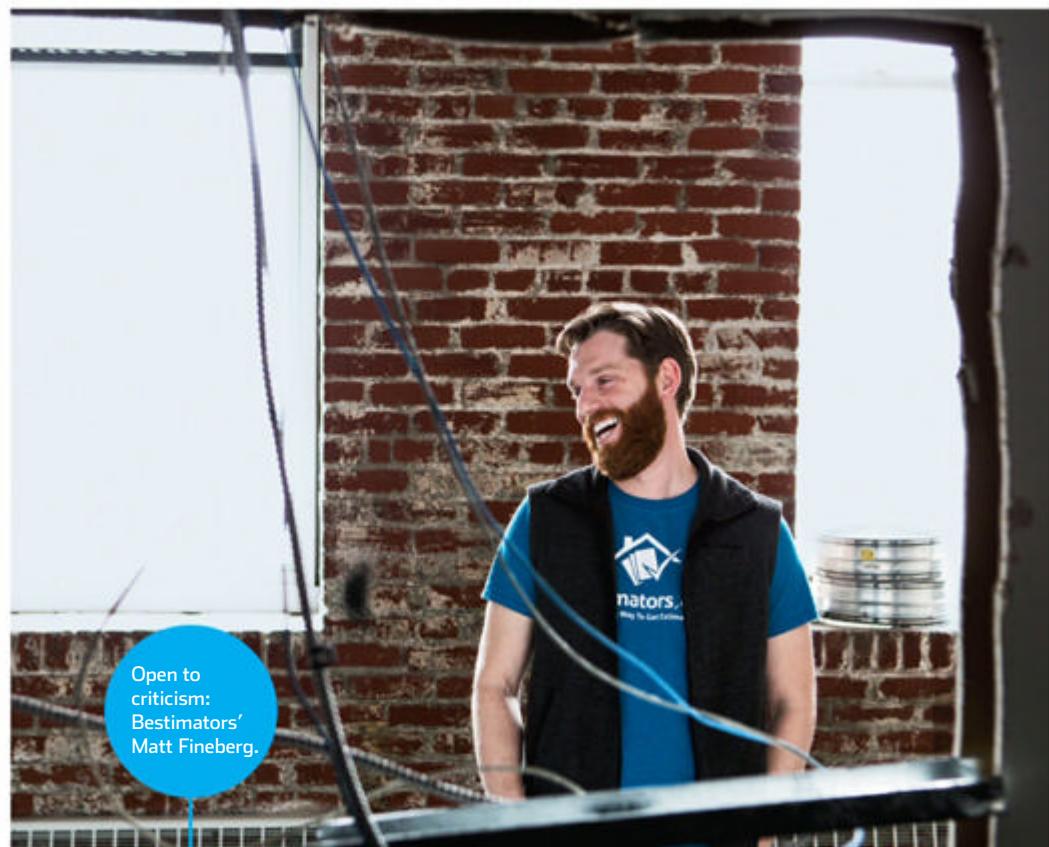
With accelerators, incubators and other such programs continuing to grow in popularity, practically every entrepreneur should be able to find a nearby small-business development initiative that can help assess and validate startup assumptions.

"Nearly every city has one associated with the SBA," says Ken Jones, associate director for the Wolff Center for Entrepreneurship at the University of Houston. "You don't need to apply to and enroll in a big-name accelerator to get good benefits and feedback."

To refine his business idea in 2011, Jake Weatherly—co-founder and CEO of Eugene, Ore.-based eligibility-verification software provider SheerID—joined a 90-day incubator bootcamp program funded by the city of Beaverton, Ore., to promote entrepreneurship in the region.

Weatherly appreciated the feedback he got from participating corporate executives and other entrepreneurs—a hard-to-impress group with extensive experience.

"Being in that program and getting that feedback allowed us to go from merely solving a problem and having a value proposition to determining if there were companies who would





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actually pay to solve this problem and how much they would pay to do it," he says.

Since launching in 2012, SheerID has grown to 27 employees and received more than \$6.5 million in financing.

FIND A MENTOR

Jones urges founders to find an outside mentor to provide unbiased feedback and guidance.

"It's easy to find people who will tell you what you want to hear, but it's very challenging to find people with experience who you respect and will be straight with you," he says.

He suggests networking at business organization and chamber of commerce events—"Those tables are full of people looking to get involved," he points out—or contacting a local chapter of the Service Corps of Retired Executives.

"With the aging of America, there are so many people with great experience who are looking for ways to help counsel or be a mentor," he says. "You don't have to pay them, and as advisors they're free to give you the feedback you need."

MINE YOUR INDUSTRY CONTACTS

Eric Tong, founder of Los Angeles-based Tech Armor, a manufacturer of screen protectors, says aspiring startups should not be afraid to seek input from past or present industry colleagues.

Building on their experience in the industry, he and his co-founder, Joseph Jaconi, tapped their network of former bosses, colleagues and customers for transparent feedback that helped shape their startup's assumptions and strategy, including getting valuable opinions about manufacturing and selling.

"We all have friends who will say 'That's awesome,' but we really value folks who understand the ins and outs of the industry and use that to challenge our thinking," Tong says.

He and Jaconi also spoke to potential consumers. Visiting electronics retailers such as Best Buy, they asked shoppers about the most important factors influencing their mobile-accessories purchasing decisions. "The resounding feedback we got was that people purchasing on e-commerce sites really want a company that will be there for them," Tong says. "So that's why customer service became a key area for us."

It appears to be working. Since launching in 2012, Tech Armor has sold more than 5 million units.

FLY IT UP THE FLAGPOLE

Mike Bott, general manager of Cincinnati-based accelerator The Brandery, says several participants in his program have pushed out unfinished versions of their offerings for potential users to test. One popular tactic is to put up a landing

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page without building out the entire product, and run Google AdWords tests to monitor click-through rates.

"Those numbers can help you see whether your value proposition resonates with people enough to take that next step," he says. "You can run it for two or three weeks and decide where to go from there."

Bott suggests building a bare-bones offering that highlights crucial components in order to get user feedback. "I'm a big proponent of building something and pushing it out as fast as you can to get real feedback, so you can rethink your product based on what people are doing with it," he says.

Sites like Product Hunt and reddit are good places to try out such a test. "You don't need tens of thousands of people on your platform. It could be 500 to 1,000, and you can really get a sense of what's working and what's not," Bott explains.

In another testing strategy used at The Branderly, an accounting startup built a rudimentary offering using Keynote presentation software, which allowed them to get responses to proposed product benefits from prospective customers.

"They built out their minimum viable product in Keynote and gave people the experience of flipping through, and got lots of great feedback that way," Bott says.

An added bonus to this type of interaction is early traction, says SheerID's Weatherly. He approached prospective customers,

including executives at Amazon and Detroit-based Fathead, with nothing but proof-of-concept software to learn about their challenges in the area of eligibility verification.

While SheerID's initial B2B sales cycle at the enterprise level was about seven months from engagement to close, Weatherly gained enough traction from those first calls to shorten the cycle once the product was ready to go.

"We were able to continue to work through the process and had a very mature suite of services and a solid team and funding before those opportunities were ready to go live," he says. "That led us to a faster start."

No matter how much runway you have to build your startup, you should resist the urge to perfect too many details before seeking feedback, because the sooner you can start getting it, the more time you have to pivot.

"Instead of building out the entire experience, build out the one thing that's very important," Bott advises. "Because if you figure out it's not as important as you thought, or the market is smaller or bigger than you thought, you could quickly build on or adjust your direction accordingly." 

CINCINNATI-BASED PAULA ANDRUSS HAS WRITTEN FOR USA TODAY AND WOMAN'S DAY AND IS A FREQUENT CONTRIBUTOR TO ENTREPRENEUR. LEARN MORE AT PAULAANDRUSS.COM.



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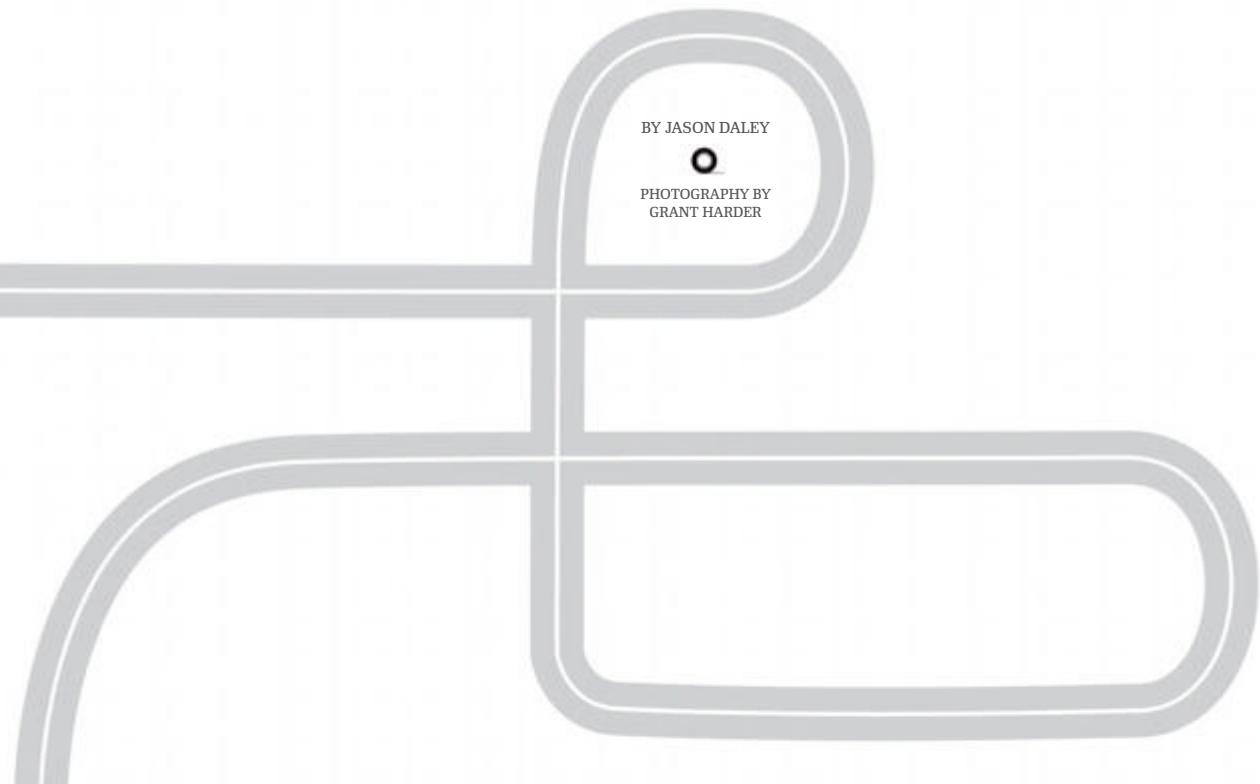
How they roll:
Velofix bike techs, including
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WITH LOW STARTUP COSTS, RAPID RETURNS AND THE ABILITY TO OPERATE INDEPENDENTLY, MOBILE FRANCHISES ARE PUTTING ANYTHING AND EVERYTHING ON WHEELS

BY JASON DALEY

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
GRANT HARDER



FRANCHISING has seen significant advancements in the past decade, from the emergence of fast-casual dining to the development of apps and cloud services to help run operations. But one of the biggest changes came on four wheels—the rise of mobile franchising.

Mobile-based businesses were once the realm of plumbers, handymen and other service technicians who would roll up to clients' homes in vans. But today it's much more, with franchises putting entire coffee

shops on bikes, building restaurants and bakeries into the backs of trucks and jamming anything they can think of into RVs. And customers love it.

During the Great Recession, as financing dried up, the franchise community began thinking about ways to make offerings more affordable. The solution, in many cases, was to put the concepts on wheels. Mobile businesses tend to have lower startup costs than brick-and-mortar operations. They also have

a shorter ramp-up, so franchisees can start bringing in revenue almost immediately, rather than negotiating a lease and waiting for a build-out.

As mobile businesses became more common, franchisors realized that the strategy wasn't just a stopgap or add-on service; mobile could be at the core of a concept. They found that time-strapped and overworked consumers wanted services brought directly to their homes or businesses. >>>

ROLLING, ROLLING, ROLLING

One of the most impressive mobile franchises is Velofix, a Vancouver-based bike-repair shop. The concept came about from the founders' frustration with storefront alternatives.

"Most independent shops don't have a preset system for booking bikes for service," explains Chris Guillemet, who founded the company with Davide Xausa and Boris Martin in 2012. "In good weather, people will bring their bikes into shops in waves and create a backlog. People sometimes have to wait one or two weeks for their bikes to get serviced."

That can be a long time to wait, especially for those who depend on their bikes to get to work. So the Velofix team developed a mobile shop that allows its techs to go directly to a customer's house or office and work on the bike from the company van.

The setup is sophisticated: a 24-foot Mercedes Sprinter van loaded with everything a full-service bike shop would need. All equipment runs on rechargeable marine batteries, meaning there are no noisy diesel generators. Skylights minimize the need for electric lighting. Tools are secured by hooks and magnetic strips and can be moved around to fit the ergonomic needs of the individual mechanics.

Each shop-on-wheels even has a small lounge where customers can sit and have a drink while talking to the mechanic as their bikes are serviced.

"I'd say 70 to 80 percent of our clients stay with us during the service," Martin says. "We have Wi-Fi, and we live-stream cycling events. They can have a coffee and chat about bikes and learn a lot about bike care and maintenance."

Customers can buy things, too—Velofix vans carry a wide range of accessories, from lights and GPS units to wheel sets (although they don't stock larger items like helmets and shoes).

Velofix has five active units in Toronto, Calgary, Ottawa and the Vancouver area and is getting ready to roll out 20 vans in the U.S. by the end of the year.

BEST IN SHOW

Donna Sheehey, based near Boston, was similarly motivated by frustration when she launched her mobile dog-grooming franchise, Zoomin Groomin, in 2004. She eventually outfitted a van with a self-contained grooming system.

Zoomin Groomin now has 11 units on the road. Though the company temporarily suspended franchising, it is relaunching the program this spring and aiming for aggressive growth. New franchisees

will operate out of Ford Transit Connects.

"Through trial and error, we figured out our layout," Sheehey explains. "We don't need a separate cab, so it's all one interior. We have a rear temperature control and comfortable flooring with lots of cabinet space. There's enough room for two people to work, though we typically have one groomer."

What makes Zoomin Groomin viable is the grooming equipment, which fits easily into the vans. The 13-gallon Eco-Wash unit uses 90 percent less water than other systems, and the hand-held wand gently sucks dirt and debris from the dog's skin in a massaging motion. The company uses Pure Oxygen Ultra Shampoo, a nontoxic product that leaves no residue. By the end of the wash and cut, dogs are about 70 percent dry.

While Zoomin Groomin is built on the idea of convenience, Sheehey admits that it's a luxury product. "We operate in more affluent areas right now," she says. "We're more of a premium type of service for people interested in organic solutions for their pets."

As many young professionals put off having children, much of their disposable income and attention is spent on pets, she explains. "They are one of our larger demographics. No expense is spared."

Road work: (from left)
Chris Guillemet,
Davide Xausa
and Boris Martin.





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The pets are in their beds, in their cars, and they want them cleaned organically. But they are too busy to take them to the groomer. That's where we fit in."

NO EXCUSES

One day when Josh York was working as a personal trainer, a customer apologized for being late because she had to drop her children off at school. "She said, 'I wish you could come to my house!'" York recalls. "I was up until 2 in the morning thinking about that. I thought that if I could professionalize that concept, how cool would it be?"

That's how his mobile fitness franchise, GymGuyz, was born. The Plainview, N.Y.-based company has 21 units and plans to open another 25 to 35 this year. It's a win-win situation: Customers get to work out at home, and trainers don't have to sit at a gym all day waiting around for clients or working the front desk.

But the heart of GymGuyz is its customized vans, which carry 365 pieces of exercise equipment, from a weight bench to medicine balls to parachutes. York, a self-described neat freak, spent a long

time figuring out a way to organize all the equipment within a vehicle.

"I could put you through a comedy hour telling you all the things I tried," he says. Eventually he found the right formula: a system of shelves, hooks and reinforced plywood cabinets. When franchisees switch to new vans, which they do every five years or so, they're able to reuse the infrastructure.

"It took a while to figure out, but good things take time to create," York says. "This stuff is very, very strong. You can't even break it with a sledgehammer, and it always looks clean."

The variety of equipment is necessary since GymGuyz workouts are customized for each client. Trainers pull out what they need from the van based on a client's fitness level and keep track of progress on proprietary software. One trainer even went out to meet a client who was stuck in traffic, and the two headed nearby for a quick workout.

BUZZKILL

While mobile franchising is becoming more popular, it's not for everyone.

Employees spend their days working out of a van, often without the structure or companionship of other workers. Brad Simon—who operates four Mosquito Joe pest-control trucks in two territories in northern Arkansas—says it takes a unique personality to work in a mobile unit.

"It needs to be someone who works well independently and someone who takes pride in their work," explains Simon, who plans to add three more territories this year. "Most of those types of people tend to be introverts, but for our business, customer interaction is critical. We need someone extroverted enough to make customers feel comfortable and who can explain our concept to interested neighbors. The task is to find someone with that fine balance."

Franchisors also need to find responsible workers who will represent the brand in a positive way as they move around town. "Our vans are a rolling office," Simon points out. "The image of our company is what people see in those vans. They're a bright yellow, rolling billboard. When I'm driving one, I'm constantly aware—to the point of



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paranoia—that I'm going to do something wrong or cut someone off!"

Like many other mobile franchises, Mosquito Joe uses customized Ford Transits. Each carries a 100-gallon tank of water, plus a custom rack to hold the sprayers that are used to rid clients' yards of mosquitoes.

But the key to the system is its technology package, says Kevin Wilson, CEO of the Virginia Beach, Va.-based company. Each van is outfitted with a tablet that syncs with the company's CRM system to optimize routes and update appointments on the road.

"It's really pretty slick," Wilson says. "Those apps cut down on the wear and tear on our trucks and save us gas. And it really makes our techs more productive."

PARTY CENTRAL

Not all mobile franchises fit into a standard van. Tempe, Ariz.-based GameTruck uses customized RVs to

bring mobile arcades to birthday parties and other events.

"Our rigs are built in Indiana, the holy land of RVs," says founder Scott Novis. "They have an incredible infrastructure down there. Our rigs are made of aluminum, so they are lightweight, don't rust and save on fuel costs. We have a really advanced heat pump, which saves on wear and tear of the power plant."

The sides of most RVs open up, allowing for indoor and outdoor screens, a dance floor and enough seating and consoles for 16 to 20 kids. An advanced cable-management system minimizes

tangles, and the interiors are handcrafted with a heavy emphasis on quality and durability.

"The worst thing that can happen is disappointing a kid," Novis says.

"That's why our trucks are tough and easily serviceable. If a plumber's van breaks down and he has to cancel, he disappoints one family. If we have to

cancel, we disappoint 20 families."

Novis argues that with the demise of arcades and the advent of social media, kids are losing the magic that comes from social interaction—even if it's while playing video games. That, he says, is what his mobile operation brings to the picture. "The core of our business is making new connections and interacting with people. People get really happy when we show up. They feel an energy that is uncommon in their lives." 

JASON DALEY, A FREQUENT CONTRIBUTOR TO ENTREPRENEUR, WRITES FROM MADISON, WIS.



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Style for miles

A health setback leads a fashionista to franchising

Soon after Lisa Kornstein received her master's degree in higher-education administration, she was on vacation with her boyfriend, looking out at the ocean and dreaming. "Someday," she said, "I'm going to open my own boutique."

It wasn't a new dream. She'd enjoyed working in a clothing store during school, and she hadn't been quiet about her ambition. In fact, her boyfriend had heard it one too many times. "He looked at me and said, 'For the love of god, stop talking about it and just do it!'" Kornstein recalls.

It was the jolt she needed. The Raleigh, N.C.-based entrepreneur wrote a business plan, found a space and, less than four months later, opened her first Scout & Molly's clothing store (named after her dogs) in 2002. The idea was simple: an unintimidating boutique with contemporary women's fashions, designed to feel like you're rummaging through your stylish best friend's closet. Kornstein would personally guide customers through the store, helping them assemble the perfect outfit with pieces from brands like Autumn Cashmere, AG Adriano Goldschmied and Halston Heritage.

But she began having health problems, and in 2008 Kornstein was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. The fact that she would often miss weeks of work or have to go home sick was influential in her decision to franchise; she designed a semi-absentee model to appeal to others who may be ill or can work only part time.

Since she started the program last year, five franchises have opened in the Southeast and several more have been sold, including five that are slated to open this spring and summer. She talked to us about how she manages her disease while building her fashion empire. —Jason Daley

Were you always into fashion?

Oh no, I was a total tomboy! My mother used to be so put-together, and I would try to make my own fashion statements by wearing red cowboy boots or a scarf as a belt.

What changed?

In grad school I'd walk my dogs past this boutique, and I became good friends with the owner. She eventually asked me if I wanted to work there—I started, and I loved it. Women would come into the boutique and feel intimidated, and I realized I had the ability to put them at ease and give them a good experience. It was magical—they'd come in anxious and leave happy. It became a passion for me, and making sales was addicting.

I try to be very honest as a salesperson. If something doesn't look good, I don't want to lie to the customer.

How does the semi-absentee model work?

When I accepted that it was possible to have employees invested in my success by incentivizing them and paying commissions, I knew it could work. We create a culture so it doesn't feel like a job. If you have employees who truly care about the store, then the semi-absentee model is possible. Anyone who thinks this is "just a job" has to go—we can't afford to have people like that in our brand. The franchisees also hire very strong managers, and we give them tools so they can monitor the store and choose inventory remotely.

How did your MS diagnosis affect your business model?

Before I was diagnosed, I was in the store all the time, six days a week. Then I had this disease and I had two small kids at home, and I had to take significant time off. It was really emotional for me. As an entrepreneur, it's really hard to delegate, and I'm an admitted control freak. I had to learn to give up control and put my business in the hands of someone who has been trained and educated properly.

I don't think there's any way I would have been receptive to franchising without MS. No amount of money would have made me think franchising would work. The diagnosis made me retrain my brain and think about everything differently. I was open to new ways of running the business. It was hard at first, but as a mom and business owner trying to keep all those balls in the air, I couldn't continue going on like that. Without MS, I would have never changed. It was the best worst thing to ever happen to me.



A shopper's best friend:
Lisa Kornstein
of Scout & Molly's.



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The industrial-chic design features nods to the city throughout. Craft cocktails are served at the granite-topped bar.

Fine dining Break out the bubbly— Denny's is a grand slam in Manhattan

Denny's is as American as apple pie—except in the Big Apple. Until recently, New York was one of a handful of U.S. cities that didn't have at least one branch of the diner.

That changed when Los Angeles-based Rahul Marwah—who is, along with his parents and sister, one of the chain's largest multi-unit franchisees—learned about the gap in the New York market while at a company convention.

"When I heard there were no Denny's in NYC, my ears perked up," he remembers. "That didn't make sense at all. In L.A., we had hundreds of restaurants. During a break, I talked to my family and told them the wheels were turning. I pulled aside the vice president of franchise development and said I wanted to go after New York City."

Marwah got the nod, and over the next year, he spent time in New York, learning about the various neighborhoods and searching for the perfect location. The result was a Denny's unlike any other, which opened last August in Manhattan on the edge of the Financial District.

The new restaurant is on the ground floor of an upscale condo building at 150 Nassau St. and is decorated with leather booths, distressed-wood flooring, copper-stamped ceilings and photos of

the city throughout. And, most impressive, it has a granite-topped bar with a custom-designed cocktail menu.

We sat down with Rahul to find out if Denny's can make it here, after making it everywhere. —*Jason Daley*

WHY MANHATTAN?

It was kind of a strategic move. We wanted to stake our claim in the city itself. One of the reasons New York City was attractive to me as an operator was because of the population density. It's not nearly as high in the outer boroughs or Long Island. The place we found was perfect—it's right across from Pace University, near the base of the Brooklyn Bridge and near one of the busiest train stations in Manhattan. So we have lots of students, tourists and commuters. And we got 5,000 square feet at a reasonable rate.

NEW YORK IS FAMOUS FOR ITS DELIS AND CAFES. DID RESIDENTS KNOW ABOUT DENNY'S?
It's a funny thing; we don't have many people come in who have never

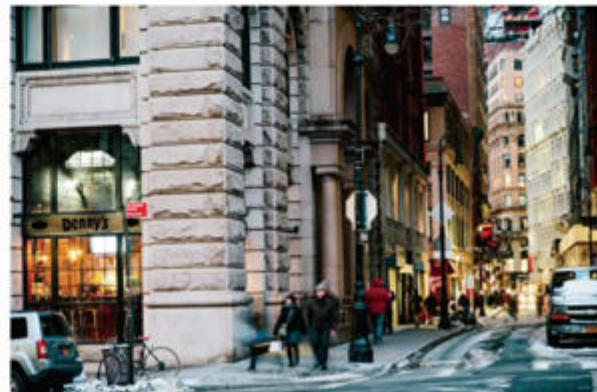
been to a Denny's. Most say things like, "Wow, I haven't been to a Denny's since I was 17." Even people born and raised in New York have visited a Denny's at some point. The restaurant has over 90 percent brand recognition. The only person I can think of who had never been to a Denny's was a student from overseas. Her friends brought her in.

RESIDENTS SUED TO KEEP DENNY'S OUT. HOW IS THE RELATIONSHIP NOW?

For them, it was largely the fear of the unknown. They think of Denny's from college and road trips or going there at 2 or 3 in the morning after drinking. This location is not like that. We close at midnight. There's not much bar traffic in our neighborhood. We now have a good, open relationship with the condo board. A lot of young families and people who live and work in the neighborhood come to our location.

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As we were crafting the cocktail menu, we sat down with our supplier. He had mocked up a menu with this Grand Cru Slam on it, which is two Grand Slams, a bottle of 2004 Dom Pérignon and a high-five from the bartender. It was a joke, but I loved it, and we put it on the menu. I never thought anyone would order it, but we were going to keep a bottle of champagne around just in case. Then, before we opened, the press picked up on it, and my bar manager called and said, "I think we need to order a case." Good thing we did, because we sold one or two per day during our first week. Now we sell about one per week. I saw a hipster couple order it who probably thought it was ironic. Then there were five or six guys who went in on it because they thought it was funny. I know a guy who ordered it with his fiancée just because they wanted a nice bottle of champagne!



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*The figures above are based upon the Item 19 Financial Performance Representation in our 2014 Franchise Disclosure Document (FDD). The sales results are from our Type 3 markets or 'Suburban' markets, which makes up the majority of our franchise locations and is the only spa type that we have been developing for the past 3 years. This is not an offer to sell a franchise.

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FRANCHISE

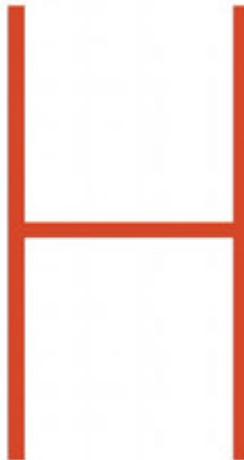
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TOP FRANCHISES
THAT GET THE JOB DONE
FROM HOME
OR ON THE ROAD

By Tracy Stapp Herold

>>>





omebased businesses—those that don't require a fixed location or any of the costs that come along with it—are among the biggest trends in franchising. In fact, nearly one-third of the companies ranked in *Entrepreneur's* Franchise 500® offer franchisees the opportunity to run a business without the need for a storefront, office or warehouse outside the home. You'll find the 100 highest-ranking of those companies on the following pages.

Excited about the low costs and flexibility of a homebased business, but not a homebody? Don't worry, *homebased* doesn't necessarily mean *homebound*. Many of the franchises on this list are also mobile businesses. While the home serves as a base of operations, franchisees and employees spend their days out and about, bringing products and services to customers. Even some quick-service companies whose franchisees were once confined to fixed storefronts are now evolving by offering the option of selling from trucks, vans and trailers.

Inclusion on this list is not intended as a recommendation of any particular franchise. No matter what type of opportunity you're seeking, always do your research before investing. That means carefully reading the company's legal documents, consulting with an attorney and an accountant and talking to franchisees to find out whether the business is right for you.

1 Jan-Pro Franchising International
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #12
 Commercial cleaning
Startup cost: \$3.1K-\$50.9K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 11,676/0
jan-pro.com

2 Cruise Planners
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #22
 Travel agency
Startup cost: \$2.1K-\$21.99K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 1,757/1
cruiseplannersfranchise.com

3 Snap-on Tools
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #25
 Professional tools and equipment
Startup cost: \$152.7K-\$318.98K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 4,581/210
snapon.com

4 Vanguard Cleaning Systems
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #26
 Commercial cleaning
Startup cost: \$9.9K-\$35.8K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 2,946/0
vanguardcleaning.com

5 Matco Tools
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #33
 Mechanics' tools and equipment
Startup cost: \$94.1K-\$248.7K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 1,543/1
gomatco.com

6 Auntie Anne's Hand-Rolled Soft Pretzels
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #34
 Soft pretzels
Startup cost: \$194.9K-\$367.6K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 1,598/17
auntieannes.com

7 Jazzercise
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #44

Dance-fitness classes, conventions, apparel and accessories
Startup cost: \$3.5K-\$75.8K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 8,370/3
jazzercise.com

8 CleanNet USA
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #45

Commercial cleaning
Startup cost: \$9.8K-\$97.95K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 2,951/14
cleannetusa.com

9 Budget Blinds
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #50

Window coverings, window film, rugs, accessories
Startup cost: \$89.2K-\$187.1K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 934/0
budget-blinds-franchise.com

10 Coverall Health-Based Cleaning System

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #60
 Commercial cleaning
Startup cost: \$14.1K-\$47.7K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 8,045/0
coverall.com

11 Chem-Dry Carpet & Upholstery Cleaning

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #63
 Carpet, drapery and upholstery cleaning; tile and stone care
Startup cost: \$39.99K-\$139.5K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 3,565/0
chemdryfranchise.com

12 Mac Tools

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #77
 Automotive tools and equipment
Startup cost: \$86.2K-\$240.3K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 781/5
mactools.com

13 Anago Cleaning Systems
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #83

Commercial cleaning
Startup cost: \$10.5K-\$65.6K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 2,456/0
anagocleaning.com

14 Kona Ice

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #87
 Shaved-ice truck
Startup cost: \$109.3K-\$124.6K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 559/15
kona-ice.com



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The average gross sales, EBITDA, and membership figures for the top 10% of Retro Fitness clubs as published in Item 19 of the Retro Fitness 2014 Franchise Disclosure Document. Franchise fee free promotion is for limited time only and is based on rebates paid to an approved Retro Fitness franchisee in the form of cash, advertising dollars or royalty credit upon meeting certain development benchmarks before or at club opening. This is not an offer to sell a franchise. Offerings made by prospectus only. ©2015 Retro Fitness LLC. All rights reserved.

FRANCHISE

15 Proforma

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #89

Printing and promotional products

Startup cost: \$4.7K-\$50.2K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 712/0

onlyproforma.com

16 Weed Man

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #91

Lawn care

Startup cost: \$68.1K-\$85.1K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 556/0

weedmanfranchise.com

17 Heaven's Best Carpet & Upholstery Cleaning

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #92

Carpet and upholstery cleaning

Startup cost: \$44.9K-\$65.9K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 1,259/0

heavensbest.com

18 Rooter-Man

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #94

Plumbing, drain and sewer cleaning

Startup cost: \$46.8K-\$137.6K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 498/21

rooterman.com

19 Pop-A-Lock Franchise System

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #96

Mobile security, biometrics, locksmithing, related services

Startup cost: \$99.99K-\$133.4K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 437/3

popalock.com/franchising.php

20 Buildingstars International

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #99

Commercial cleaning

Startup cost: \$2.2K-\$52.4K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 532/0

buildingstars.com

21 CertaPro Painters Ltd.

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #101

Residential and commercial painting

Startup cost: \$129K-\$161.5K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 453/0

ownacertapro.com

22 Bricks 4 Kidz

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #102

Lego-engineering classes, camps, parties

Startup cost: \$33.8K-\$51.1K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 606/2

bricks4kidz.com

23 Pillar To Post Home Inspectors

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #109

Home inspections

Startup cost: \$33.4K-\$41.6K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 456/0

pillartopost.com

24 Home Helpers/Direct Link

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #112

Medical/nonmedical personal care

Startup cost: \$64.5K-\$104.9K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 652/0

homehelpershomecare.com

25 Novus Glass

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #113

Auto glass repair and replacement

Startup cost: \$46.8K-\$229.5K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 1,627/17

novusfranchising.com

26 American Leak Detection

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #115

Concealed water, gas and sewer leak-detection

Startup cost: \$76.8K-\$259.6K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 365/27

americanleakdetection.com



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27 Club Z! In-Home Tutoring Services
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #116

In-home tutoring
Startup cost: \$32.6K-\$56.6K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 389/0
clubztutoring.com

28 Sculpture Hospitality
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #122

Liquor inventory-control services
Startup cost: \$43.4K-\$57.1K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 372/2
sculpturehospitality.com

29 N-Hance
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #125

Wood floor and cabinet refinishing
Startup cost: \$24.3K-\$131.98K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 347/0
nhancefranchise.com

30 HomeVestors of America
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #127

Home buying, repair and selling
Startup cost: \$42.3K-\$240.3K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 544/0
homevestors.com

31 Coffee News
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #137

Weekly newspaper distributed at restaurants
Startup cost: \$10.3K-\$11.3K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 799/5
coffeenews.com

32 Griswold Home Care
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #138

Nonmedical home care
Startup cost: \$98.5K-\$121.2K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 251/10
griswoldhomecare.com

33 Steamatic
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #146

Insurance/disaster restoration, cleaning, mold remediation
Startup cost: \$120.5K-\$197.2K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 349/0
steamatic.com

34 Lawn Doctor
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #147

Lawn, tree and shrub care; pest control
Startup cost: \$81.5K-\$99.99K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 482/0
lawndoctorfranchise.com

35 CruiseOne
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #150

Travel agency
Startup cost: \$4.6K-\$26.3K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 990/0
cruiseonefranchise.com

36 Mint Condition Franchising
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #153

Commercial cleaning, building maintenance
Startup cost: \$4.9K-\$45.4K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 282/0
mintconditioninc.com

37 U.S. Lawns
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #155

Commercial grounds care
Startup cost: \$32.8K-\$79.3K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 264/0
uslawns.com

38 Tutor Doctor
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #156

Tutoring
Startup cost: \$62.5K-\$100.7K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 400/0
tutordocotoropportunity.com

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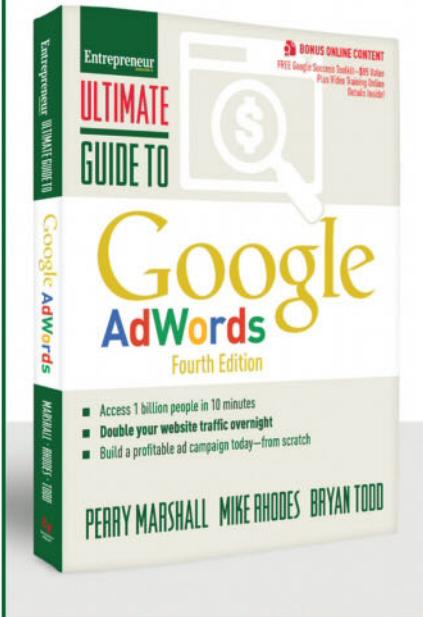
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InXpress franchisees
Lynn and Chris Phillips.



HOW DID YOU
GET THROUGH
THAT INITIAL
ROUGH PERIOD?

Chris: I think InXpress' strength is the people who are involved with the business, both in the corporate office and as franchisees. I knew nothing about sales, but I learned from the franchisees who were

there already. I would also spend hours talking on the phone with [former InXpress CEO] Ken Brockbank, who is now our corporate trainer. That's what really taught me how to sell.

Lynn: Now that Chris has moved up very quickly in his sales, he always helps others. And that's one thing I really love about InXpress. We're like a family.

Chris: That's how we got where we are now, so we don't mind helping others. Although I have to tell you, it's a very competitive group.

HOW HAS YOUR BUSINESS CHANGED SINCE THOSE EARLY DAYS?

Chris: It's not just the two of us anymore. Once the business started to click, all of a sudden it was like, "Oh wow, we need help." We have three full-time sales reps and one more part time. We also have three customer-service reps who work in our home office. We realized a long time ago that you have to be customer-service-centric to succeed in this market. That's what we feel makes us different from the next guy.

Lynn: We have a lot of relationships with our customers. They know that when they call us, they're going to get us.

DOES WORKING FROM HOME LIMIT YOUR BUSINESS?

Chris: Not at all. InXpress has an open selling policy. We concentrate on door-to-door sales in our area, but we aggressively market our services around the country as well. If we make a deal with a customer here who gives us a lead on someone in Minnesota or Tennessee, we can follow up on it and don't have to hand it off. Our work is our work. We've got customers throughout the country, and even in places like the U.K. and Moscow. With this business, you have unlimited opportunities, and it can be done anywhere.

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pillartopost.com/entrepreneur

39 Rainbow International Restoration & Cleaning

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #167

Indoor cleaning and restoration

Startup cost: \$156.2K-\$256.1K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 311/0

rainbowinternationalfranchise.com

40 MaidPro

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #174

Residential cleaning

Startup cost: \$42.5K-\$114.8K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 182/1

maidpro.com

41 CPR-Cell Phone Repair

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #175

Electronics repairs and sales

Startup cost: \$24.6K-\$228.5K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 169/3

cellphonerepair.com

42 Seniors Helping Seniors

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #176

Nonmedical home care

Startup cost: \$86.8K-\$123.9K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 249/2

seniorshelpingseniors.com

43 Soccer Shots Franchising

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #180

Soccer programs for ages 2 to 8

Startup cost: \$18.7K-\$25.5K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 152/8

soccershotsfranchising.com

44 High Touch-High Tech

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #183

Science activities for schools/parties

Startup cost: \$59.9K-\$63.6K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 167/28

sciencemadefunfranchise.net

45 My Gym Children's Fitness Center

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #184

Early-learning/fitness programs

Startup cost: \$34.3K-\$247.2K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 329/0

mygym.com

46 AdvantaClean

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #187

Environmental services

Startup cost: \$126.5K-\$373.3K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 201/0

advantacleanfranchise.com

47 ASP-America's Swimming Pool Company

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #188

Swimming-pool maintenance, repairs, renovations

Startup cost: \$52.8K-\$89.8K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 159/1

aspoolco.com



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FRANCHISE

48 HappyFeet Legends International

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #190

Soccer programs for ages 2 to 18

Startup cost: \$21.3K-\$25.2K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 151/4

happysoccerfeet.com

49 WIN Home Inspection

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #192

Home inspections

Startup cost: \$33.9K-\$54.5K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 182/0

winfranchising.com

50 Mr. Sandless/Dr. DecknFence

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #193

Interior and exterior sandless wood refinishing

Startup cost: \$9.3K-\$52.7K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 261/11

mrsandless.com

51 Window Genie

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #196

Residential window cleaning, window tinting, pressure washing

Startup cost: \$89.8K-\$139K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 210/0

windowgenie.com

52 Kitchen Tune-Up

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #203

Residential and commercial kitchen and bath remodeling

Startup cost: \$45.8K-\$55.9K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 165/0

kitchentuneup.com

53 Valpak Direct Marketing Systems

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #204

Direct-mail and digital advertising

Startup cost: \$82.2K-\$200.8K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 162/2

valpakfranchising.com

54 The Grounds Guys

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #216

Landscape maintenance

Startup cost: \$72.5K-\$205.1K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 193/0

groundsguysfranchise.com

55 Paul Davis Emergency Services

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #217

Emergency restoration

Startup cost: \$43.5K-\$150.7K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 96/0

pauldavis.com

56 Fresh Coat

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #218

Residential and commercial painting

Startup cost: \$49.4K-\$76.95K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 112/0

freshcoatpaintersfranchise.com

57 Transworld Business Advisors

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #219

Business brokerage; franchise consulting

Startup cost: \$57.2K-\$74.7K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 174/0

discover.tworld.com

58 ShelfGenie Franchise Systems

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #220

Custom pullout shelving for cabinets and pantries

Startup cost: \$70.1K-\$131.3K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 132/40

shelfgenie.com

59 Just Between Friends Franchise Systems

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #222

Children's and maternity consignment-sale events

Startup cost: \$24.1K-\$33.7K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 144/0

jbfsale.com

60 Caring Transitions

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #225

Sales of estates and household goods

Startup cost: \$52.9K-\$81.5K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 165/0

caringtransitions.com

61 Dale Carnegie Training

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #228

Workplace training and development

Startup cost: \$26K-\$182.5K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 216/2

dalecarnegie.com

62 Signal 88 Security

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #229

Private security guard and patrol services

Startup cost: \$85.4K-\$135.7K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 98/2

signal88.com

63 CMIT Solutions

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #232

IT and business services for small businesses

Startup cost: \$129.2K-\$171.5K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 143/0

cmitfranchise.com

64 The Glass Guru

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #234

Window and glass restoration and replacement

Startup cost: \$30.2K-\$119.99K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 86/1

theglassguru.com

65 Doc Popcorn

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #239

Kettle-cooked popcorn

Startup cost: \$73K-\$378.1K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 96/1

docpopcorn.com



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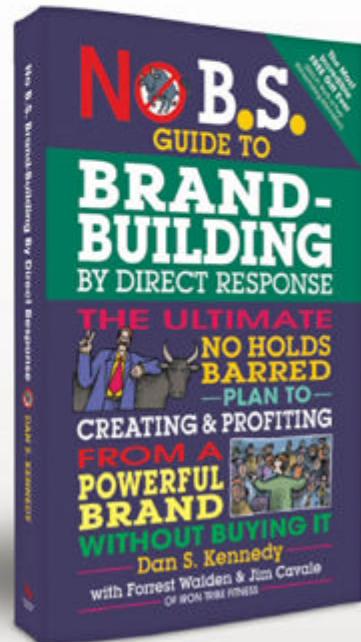
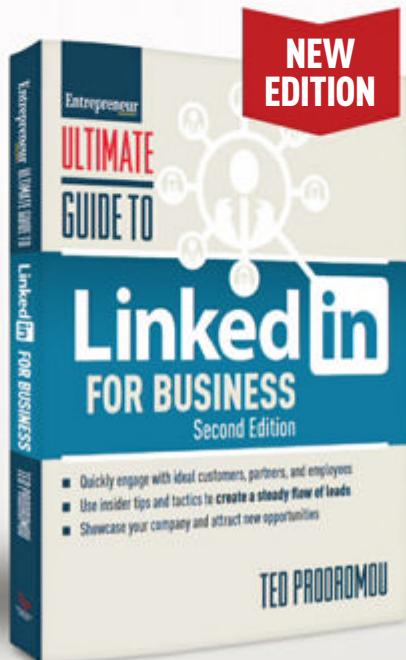
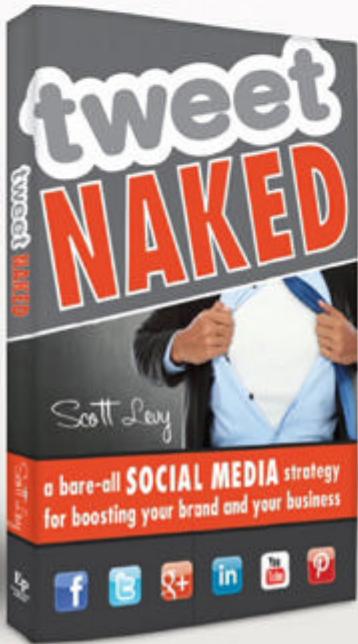
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FRANCHISE

66 Acti-Kare

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #240

Nonmedical home care

Startup cost: \$32.6K-\$51.6K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 73/0

actikare.com

67 Aire Serv

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #243

HVAC services

Startup cost: \$85.1K-\$216.4K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 183/0

aireservfranchise.com

68 Pinkberry Ventures

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #245

Frozen yogurt, frozen-yogurt shakes,
Greek-yogurt smoothies

Startup cost: \$311.3K-\$615.8K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 250/16

pinkberry.com

69 InXpress

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #250

Shipping services

Startup cost: \$55.3K-\$120.2K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 262/0

inxpress.com

70 GameTruck Licensing

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #254

Mobile video game theaters

Startup cost: \$118.3K-\$318.4K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 70/0

gametruckpartyfranchise.com

71 Plan Ahead Events

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #255

Corporate event planning

Startup cost: \$45.9K-\$71.2K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 129/0

discoverplanaheadevents.com

72 Jet-Black Franchise Group

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #257

Asphalt maintenance

Startup cost: \$46K-\$109.3K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 84/10

jet-black.com

73 Dryer Vent Wizard International

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #262

Dryer-vent cleaning, replacement

Startup cost: \$59.95K-\$89.9K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 65/0

dryerventwizard.com

74 Aire-Master of America

2015 Franchise 500 rank: #263

Restroom deodorizing and maintenance

Startup cost: \$36.1K-\$124.9K

Total franchises/co.-owned: 101/4

airemaster.com



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75 **City Publications**
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #266
Publication for affluent homeowners
Startup cost: \$80K-\$267.9K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 95/0
citypublication.com

76 **American Poolplayers Association**
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #271
Recreational billiard league
Startup cost: \$16.7K-\$19.9K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 307/6
poolplayers.com

77 **CarePatrol Franchise Systems**
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #272
Assisted-living referral and placement
Startup cost: \$59K-\$73.6K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 127/1
carepatrol.com

78 **FocalPoint Coaching**
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #276
Business coaching and consulting
Startup cost: \$61.6K-\$113.9K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 126/0
focalpointcoaching.com

79 **WSI Digital Marketing**
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #279
Internet services
Startup cost: \$64.4K-\$171.7K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 953/2
wsiworld.com

80 **MRINetwork**
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #281
Permanent placement and contract staffing
Startup cost: \$73.7K-\$98.9K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 566/0
mrinetwork.com

81 **Sit Means Sit Dog Training**
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #293
Dog training
Startup cost: \$45K-\$123.9K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 82/1
sitmeanssit.com

82 **Young Rembrandts Franchise**
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #312
Art classes for ages 3 to 12
Startup cost: \$40.4K-\$48.7K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 108/0
youngrembrandtsfranchise.com

83 **Amazing Athletes**
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #313
Educational sports programs
Startup cost: \$38.95K-\$48.95K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 81/0
amazingathletes.com

84 **Precision Concrete Cutting**
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #317
Uneven-sidewalk repair
Startup cost: \$150K-\$176.5K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 42/5
pccfranchise.com

85 **KidzArt**
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #320
Art-education programs, products and services
Startup cost: \$46.1K-\$52.8K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 107/0
kidzart.com

86 **AmeriSpec Home Inspection Services**
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #321
Home inspections
Startup cost: \$44.3K-\$75.5K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 290/0
amerispec.com

87 **Border Magic/Boulder Designs**
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #323
Concrete landscape edging, walkways, stepping stones, custom boulder signage
Startup cost: \$54.7K-\$121.9K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 93/1
bordermagic.com

88 **JumpBunch**
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #324
Mobile children's sports and fitness programs
Startup cost: \$28.2K-\$63.6K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 57/0
jumpbunch.com

89 **Nurse Next Door Home Care Services**
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #326
Medical/nonmedical home care
Startup cost: \$134.6K-\$180.4K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 75/1
nursesnextdoorfranchise.com

90 **Sir Grout Franchising**
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #330
Grout, tile, stone and wood restoration
Startup cost: \$75.5K-\$134.9K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 34/2
sirgrout.com

91 **TSS Photography**
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #332
Youth sports, school and event photography
Startup cost: \$42.3K-\$77.2K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 229/0
tssphotography.com



A hand holding a professional digital SLR camera, pointing it towards the viewer. The camera has a large lens and a flash attached. The background is plain white.

92 **Unishippers Global Logistics**
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #335
Shipping services
Startup cost: \$57.4K-\$654.5K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 249/48
unishippers.com

93 **Heits Building Services**
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #340
Commercial cleaning and maintenance
Startup cost: \$9K-\$71.95K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 201/0
heits.com

94 **Mosquito Squad**
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #343
Outdoor pest control
Startup cost: \$14.6K-\$62.1K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 141/0
mosquitosquadfranchise.com

95 **Hallmark Homecare**
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #345
Caregiver search, recruitment and placement
Startup cost: \$13.9K-\$26.9K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 75/0
hallmarkhomecare.com

96 **Restoration 1**
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #346
Insurance/disaster restoration and cleaning
Startup cost: \$86.8K-\$152.7K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 24/1
restoration1.com

97 **Renew Crew**
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #352
Environmentally friendly exterior surface cleaning and protection
Startup cost: \$44.3K-\$69.6K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 33/0
renewcrewfranchise.com

98 **Homes & Land**
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #353
Real-estate advertising magazine
Startup cost: \$47.1K-\$127K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 210/20
homesandland.com

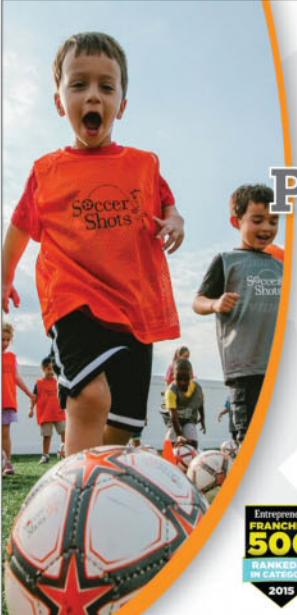
99 **Happy & Healthy Products**
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #356
Frozen fruit bars
Startup cost: \$37.2K-\$113.1K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 63/0
happyandhealthy.com

100 **Fresh Healthy Vending**
2015 Franchise 500 rank: #357
Snack and beverage vending machines
Startup cost: \$119.3K-\$206.6K
Total franchises/co.-owned: 185/35
freshvending.com

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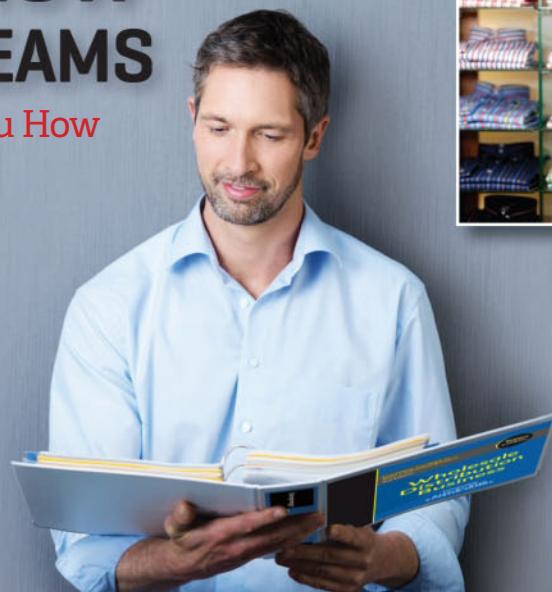
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